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THE HISTORY OF
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THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS

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STAFF

Hal Schuster
Publisher/Editor
Robert Lewis
Prod. Mgr.
Art Director
James Van Hise
John Peel
Ron Goulart
Contributing Editors
Cynthia Brodwater
Asst. to Publisher
Frank Getta
Maurie M. Cocheu
Howie Turner
Production Assistants
James R. Martin
Asst. Art Director
Sandra Maxwell
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Jack Schuster
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For advertising information: Jack Schuster (813) 977-2070

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FEATURE NEWS

MARVEL COMICS RAISES PRICES

In a move that has been expected for well over a year, at least since DC Comics raised their price from 60 cents to 75 cents, Marvel Comics has finally bit the bullet and raised their prices virtually across the board.

"We were able to hold the prices down for a year longer than anybody expected us to at this time, and we're going to do everything we can to keep them down in the future," asserted company Vice President Michael Hobson in the same announcement in which he officially reported the price hike.

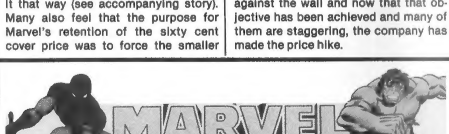
"We feel that the comics industry is beginning to strengthen encouragingly and we want to do everything we can to make sure that the trend continues. We kept the increase to a minimum and plan to keep it there as long as we possibly can.

"When we decided that the price would have to finally change we determined that it would only change as much as those costs demanded and no more."

According to Steve Saffel, Marvel's press liason, all regular size comic books which previously sold for sixty cents will be sixty-five cents and continue to be printed on standard newsprint (unlike DC's seventy-five cent line which is printed on Mandobrite newsprint) although both **G.I. Joe** and **Transformers** will become seventy-five cent titles joining Marvel's limited edition comic books which will retain their current price tag.

At this time no one at Marvel seems quite sure what will happen to the books which carry a dollar price tag such as **King Conan** although they are pretty sure that if the price is raised it will be by 25 cents and the books will go to the higher quality newsprint. The Epic Comics line appears unchanged although the New Star Comics line will also be raised from the announced 60 cent tag to 65 cents.

It is interesting that Marvel states that the comic book market is very healthy at present as many do not see it that way (see accompanying story). Many also feel that the purpose for Marvel's retention of the sixty cent cover price was to force the smaller competing comic book publishers up against the wall and now that that objective has been achieved and many of them are staggering, the company has made the price hike.



MARVEL UK ENTERS THE MARKET

Marvel UK, the British subsidiary of Marvel Comics, has entered the American market with several new releases. The company had begun to distribute its popular **Doctor Who Monthly** and **Starburst** stateside a short time ago. Now one other title will also be offered.

Captain Britain, a winner of the fan-issued Eagle Award in Britain, offers several strips. The title strip is about Brian Braddock who fled to nearby Darkmoor when the university he attended was attacked. There he met the legendary Merlin and his daughter Roma, who changed his life by giving him super powers and a new identity. The strip is by Jamie Delano and Alan Davis and features a hero in his nation's flag much like Captain America.

Also featured in the book are The Freefall Warriors, Absiom Daak, Dalek Killer and Night Raven. Night Raven is much in the Batman mold, while Absiom Daak is an obvious Doctor Who spin-off and The Warriors are a science fantasy.

Distribution to American specialty shops will be through Titan Distributors.

V, FLEXOGRAPHIC PRESSES AND GARCIA LOPEZ

The news at DC Comics can be summed up in three words: V, Flexographic presses and Jose Garcia Lopez. **V** is a new comic book based on the popular new television series. Beginning in December, DC Comics will begin to publish a licensed comic book which will pick-up from the premise of the weekly series and will also feature all new adventures of the cast. Writer Cary Bates plans to introduce new characters, mixing them with the regular cast of the television series.

The DC Comics version will be pencilled by Carmine Infantino, inked by Tony DeZuniga and edited by Marv Wolfman, who also edits DC's **Star Trek** series and is the co-creator of the Teen Titans. Bob Greenberger will assist as associate editor.

Flexographic presses are a new development at World Color Press in Sparta, Illinois, the company that prints almost all of the comic books in America. DC Production Manager Bob Rozakis spent the last few months

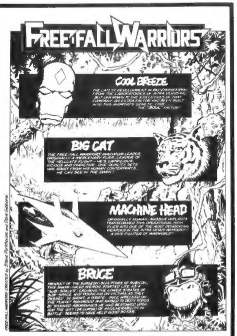
working closely with the printer to use the new press with a final test run on a Superman book. The press is ready to roll and the first title off was **Spanner's Galaxy.**

Rozakis flew to Sparta to oversee the first press run. "From the time Sparta started working on this new printing process," said Bob, "we've been eager to cooperate with them. The technology of the Flexographic allows us to improve the quality of the printing on Mando paper in ways we'd never thought possible before. DC will be the first publisher to use the press, part of our constant commitment to improve the quality of our books."

"We're so excited about the new press that we'll start providing the superior quality printed books at no extra cost," commented Bruce Bristow, DC's Marketing Director.

DC plans to print all its mini-series on the new press.

As reported last issue, George Perez has left the Teen Titans titles. Replacing him on the limited edition, higher quality format is Jose Garcia Lopez, an artist considered to be one of the best in the field today by many. Lopez is regarded as a very talented **illustrator and a supreme master of the** human figure (see the recent **Comics Feature** interview with John Buscema). While it is not known how many fans will react to this change on a popular title it is felt that the book is in very fine hands. Lopez will be replaced on **Atari Force** by Ed Barreto and Ricardo Villagran. New writer, and creator of the now-defunct Capital title **Nexus,** Mike Baron will helm the new direction for that book.



The British are invading our shores via Marvel. © Marvel Comics Group

Walter Koenig will be doing a story entitled "Chekov's Choice" for an issue of **Star Trek** to be released by DC Comics some time next summer. Dan Spiegle is the artist for that project. Joe Staton returns to Green Lantern as the regular penciller beginning with #189.

Continued on page 55

HEROES

THE NEW TEEN TITANS

By James Van Hise

Teenage sidekicks and second string heroes have never had any charm for me. I read the Sixties version of the Teen Titans. And even as the mid-teens comic reader I was at the time, I found the title to be lacklustre and superficial. As sidekicks they had been largely annoying. On their own or as a team they always seemed to be playing out of their league. Whether drawn with the harmless and unengaging super-heroics of artist Nick Cardy (who was definitely better drawing the more down to earth, tongue-in-cheek strips such as Bat Lash), or even with work by the premier superhero artist of the day, Neal Adams, the Teen Titans were still second rate heroes.

Thus when D.C. announced their revival under Marv Wolfman and George Perez, I decided to pass. I couldn't imagine the same characters being any less boring this time around than they were before. Even though George Perez is one of my favorite comic book artists, the subject left me cold.

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A CHANGED ATTITUDE

But then I started hearing raves about the book. About the writing. Could teenage heroes really be anything better than silly and inept pretenders to the role of superheroes? Could I ever really care about characters who seldom had enough on the ball to keep from getting in their own way?

I gave the book a try with issue #10 and was hooked. This was *good* writing! The characters had believable personalities and the sense of jeopardy was genuine. The fact that several of the characters were new helped quite a bit as well. While I still had to put up with the likes of Robin, Kid Flash, Wonder Girl and The Changeling (a silly green character whom I'd disliked even when he was called Beast Boy), there were some new characters in the form of Raven, Cyborg and Starfire. These were so interesting that they overwhelmed the old tired ones from the days of yore. If you don't think that was the intention, take a look at how many of the old Titans are still around who were in the first issue of *The New Teen Titans*. Kid Flash is gone; Robin has become Nightwing. Wonder Girl has been so transformed under Wolfman and Perez as to be their own. They've turned her from what was a silly afterthought into one as interesting as any of the others. While it took the *X-Men* a couple of years to catch on in their new version, sheer creativity brought the *Teen Titans* from out of nowhere and made them a comic book sensation. It tends to restore one's faith in comics.

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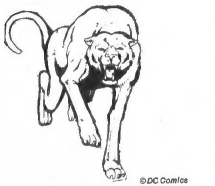
THE CREATIVE TEAM

While Marvel seems unable to keep one creative team on a book for more than a few issues, D.C. tries to line up a team and keep them together. Thus Wolfman and Perez have been the creative force on this book for over forty issues (plus annuals, specials and a new, concurrently-running series). What's even more fascinating is that the book has built-in quality, layer upon layer, trying new things and deepening the richness of the stories. If anything, what has been a very good series has gotten even better, reaching an incredible peak with the four issue "Judas Contract" adventure.

The new version of the Teen Titans came about when Marv Wolfman left Marvel to work for D.C. Not wanting to take a title away from someone else, he preferred creating new ones which he could develop and explore. He wanted to do a Teen Titans comic and worked out a few ideas for it with editor Len Wein. But the Titans had been tried twice before by D.C. and failed both times. It wasn't until Marv had interested George Perez in drawing it that D.C. was willing to give it a try.

The first appearance was an introductory story and sneak preview in *D.C. Comics Presents #26* (July-August '78) which appeared about three months before the first issue of the comic. Most prognosticators, including artist George Perez, figured the book would last about six issues. Up until that time D.C. just didn't have a track record for successful new titles. But this one took off running, growing steadily in popularity. Like a good movie, word of mouth gave the book "legs" until by around issue #13 it had become the first D.C. title to sell over one hundred thousand copies in the direct market.



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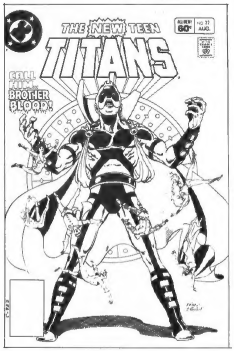

RAVEN

What helped to get this series moving is that each character had a working history before they were introduced—particularly the newest characters, who were actually the most interesting and colorful.

The new Teen Titans actually came to be via the manipulations of Raven who was trying to help Starfire, as well as herself.

While early issues of *The New Teen Titans* revealed who Raven was, it wasn't until issue #2 of the *Tales Of The New Teen Titans* mini-series that the origin was explored in detail.

Raven is the most intricate of the characters in the series. She remains aloof from the others and yet there is always something churning just below the surface. That is because she is the daughter of a demon. The demon Trigon. Trigon is the manifestation of all of the evil purged from the people of Azarath who established their kingdom between the dimensions ages ago. But the evils they exorcised from themselves were brought forth during a ceremony in another dimension, and the form they took on was Trigon.

Continued on page 59

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Games

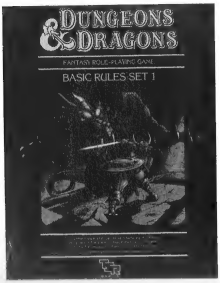
By Steve Perrin

WHAT ARE THESE PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT?

After two exposures to this column, some of you are probably wondering what we are talking about. "Role-playing games? Isn't that demonic or something? Is it anything like D & D?" Those of you who do know what we are talking about can skip on to the "What's Happening" sub-heading.

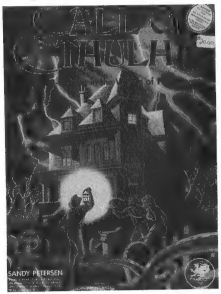
Role-playing can be described as "improvisational radio theatre". The players take on the roles of characters generated through the rules system and provide dialog and motivation for them. One player, usually called a gamemaster, acts as the director of the drama providing a scenario and non-player characters for the players' characters to react to.

It all started about ten years ago when Tactical Studies Rules, a struggling young wargame company trying to compete with industry giants such as Avalon Hill and Simulations Publications, published three half-sized books in a box and titled it *Dungeons and Dragons*. It was the first published set of role-playing rules. Gamers today deride the game systems so clumsily presented in that original box, but without them there would be no role-playing game industry, and I would still be working for insurance companies.



D & D became an industry phenomenon, then shot into national prominence when discovered by high schoolers who had no other exposure to what the industry was starting to call "adventure games". Like Kleenex and Xerox, D & D became a catchword to describe all the games which came after it, even though many of them do not follow the underground-maze-filled-with-monsters-and-treasure format it popularized.

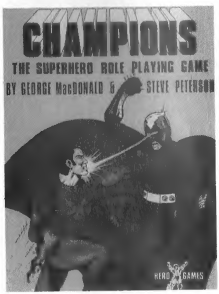
After the first couple of years, game designers broke out of the fantasy mold set by D & D and tried role-playing in other settings. Game Designers' Workshop's *Traveller* started the science fiction role-playing genre and Chaosium got the horror-fantasy ball rolling with *Call of Cthulhu*.



Since fantasy role-playing emphasized spectacular battles and magic spells and items which performed phenomenal feats, it didn't take long for designers to apply these concepts to the genre that cried for them —superhero comic books.

The first entry into this market was *Superhero 2044*, published by its author. It was primitive and had a combat system that I, at least, never could figure out. Like D & D, it divided the heroes up into character classes; making the assumption that all comics heroes are either highly-"trained" Ubermensch (like Tarzan), technology-warping Toolmasters (like Iron Man) or super-powered Uniques (like Superman). Any comics reader will testify, however, that almost all heroes are combinations of all of the above and cannot be classified. The strongpoint was the campaign rules, the weakpoint was the game system.

The second entry into the field was the first edition of *Villains & Vigilantes* from Fantasy Games Unlimited. Teenagers Jeff Dee (now penciliing and inking for DC and First) and Jack Herman provided an interesting system for creating superheroes based on the actual characteristics of the player. In effect, the player got to play him/herself, with super powers. The game system was far more comprehensible than its predecessor, though it had its own glitches. The game sold well but never received any support from FGU, and gradually faded from the shelves.



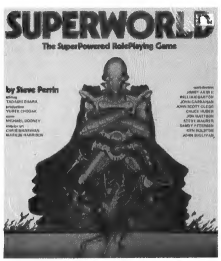
The third major entry into the field set the mold for the future. After three years of playtesting, George MacDonald and Steve Peterson self-published *Champions*. The easily-understood game mechanics were a plus with this game, but the major attraction was the system for creating

the character the player wanted, just by paying points provided by the character creation system.

The authors quantified most of the powers they observed in comics and gave them each a point rating. Players are given 100 points to start with, which is not enough to buy an effective hero. To offer the needed power points *Champions* provides a list of limitations to put on purchased powers which cuts down their price, and a list of disadvantages to the character (such as a tendency to go berserk or a susceptibility to glowing meteorites). Careful creation of a character can take hours but juggling the powers and justifying the point values is half the fun of the game.

Criticisms are mostly of the complexity of using Disadvantages, Advantages and Limitations to duplicate powers found in the comics. The authors have maintained that any power can be duplicated by using the right combination of modifiers. Critics ask why the authors couldn't just provide the actual power descriptions and save the players some headaches. It is a plus for Hero Games that this is the only serious criticism of their flagship game.

Most successors to *Champions* use some combination of the random system of V & V and the point value system of *Champions*. My own *Superworld* allows for random generation of initial characteristics, then lets the total of these dice rolls provide the hero points for buying powers. Unlike *Champions,* I set out to duplicate the powers found in comics. *Superworld* also uses the standard Chaosium game system pioneered in my *RuneQuest* which aids in using it with any other Chaosium game.



The new edition of *Villains & Vigilantes,* while still counting on random generation of super-abilities, now allows for players picking the powers they want under the supervision of the gamemaster. After all, just as a comic book about a group of omnipotent heroes would rapidly bore everyone, a gaming group full of omnipotent player-characters makes for a boring campaign.

SO WHAT'S THIS CAMPAIGN JAZZ?

We have dealt with the history of role-playing and the genesis of superhero role-playing. But who plays it? How do you play it?

The people who play superhero games are as diverse as the comic book fans. Like any game, a role-playing game is a social occasion; a chance to get together with friends and chatter while ostensibly concentrating on a game. Usually, the players are at least readers of comic books, though sometimes they have been recruited through playing other games, and have never seen a comic book in their lives.

Even people new to comic books can get into the spirit of these games. There is something very satisfying about having the power to knock someone through a wall while promoting the general welfare of the neighborhood—not to mention the country. Some players even get turned on to comic books through playing the games.

Commonly, a gamemaster will establish a campaign. He will pick a city. After his players have generated their characters, he will start setting up plot lines for scenarios. Like the author of a comic book he will play around with the supporting cast ("Your aged mother has just been captured by F.I.R.E. agents. You can see the helicopter a mile away over the river. What are you going to do?"), establish continuing villains ("As you survey the scene of the crime, a surviving bank teller brings you a glossy sheet of paper. On the paper is a picture of Doctor Dread and the scrawled message, 'Sorry you missed the party. Love and kisses, Dr. D' ") and buried hints of things to come ("Oh, by the way, as you fly over the foothills on your way to Dr. Dread's hideout, you see that the Volkswagen-sized baby volcano that was in the papers this morning is now about the size of a barn.")

Players will create characters who are exactly like various published heroes with the serial numbers filed off ("This is *Starflame*, she's a long-haired alien who can fly and shoot energy bolts.") or studiously different from any character they've ever seen in comics, though being totally different from any that has ever appeared in comics is a good trick. First-time players should probably develop characters who are at least similar to known comic book heroes, if only to have a jumping-off place for role-playing.

After all, role-playing is the name of the game. A player can just play a character within the mechanics of the game system, solely for the oppor-

Continued on page 28

THE SILVER AGE

PART 2 BIZARRE CHARACTERS AND FANTASTIC WEAPONS

By Jacoba and Jones

Excerpts from "The Comic Book Heroes" tobe published in mid 1985 by Crown.

Even as the science fiction rage was helping revitalize the work of Julius Schwartz and Mort Weisinger, it was producing more mixed results from the third prominent DC stable, that of Jack Schiff.

Schiff had begun as a pulp editor at Standard Magazines in the 1930s, and had, in fact, helped hire Mort Weisinger to his post there in 1938. When Weisinger entered the military during World War II he completed the circle by having Schiff hired to take his place at DC. By the time of Weisinger's return Schiff had made himself an indispensible part of the company. He acted as DC's Managing Editor for over twenty years. . He coordinated production schedules, issued writing and art assignments and acted as liason between the company's front office—mainly Publisher Jack Liebowitz and dedicated Editorial Director Whitney Ellsworth—and its many creative freelancers. He also worked as a contact between the company and such agencies as the Comics Code Authority (the industry's self-censorship body since 1954) and the U.S. Government (for various educational and international projects). A man of deep social consciousness and a firm believer in the power of the comics medium to educate children, Schiff put his greatest energies into a series of "institutional pages". These were one-page messages about issues as diverse as racial tolerance, consideration for neighbors and the joys of public libraries. In effective comic-strip format, they were coordinated with the National Social Welfare Assembly and appeared in every DC comic from 1950 to 1967.

PROSPECTOR... in OUTER SPACE!
A SPACEMAN-AT-WORK FEATURE
I WISH WE KNEW BEFOREHAND THAT THOSE DIAMOND STALAGMITES WERE PROTECTED BY DEADLY BIRD-BEASTS!

© DC Comics

JACK SCHIFF: EDITOR

On top of these considerable chores, Schiff was also responsible for editing a wide range of comics, including the three titles featuring DC's second most popular hero: *Batman, Detective Comics* and *World's Finest Comics.* During the 1950s he also launched *House of Mystery, House of Secrets, My Greatest Adventure* and *Tales of the Unexpected,* a quartet of titles featuring supernatural mystery and adventure in what Schiff describes as "the Ambrose Bierce tradition". Like

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his friend Weisinger, Schiff believed in being deeply involved in the creation of his comics, down to plotting most of the stories himself. He says, "I insisted on good, tight plots with characterization and gimmicks, but pictures with colorful locale and sweeping action," along with factual accuracy and good taste. Thus from his desk came what were perhaps the best-crafted and most colorful tales of DC's Golden Age.

Because of the size of his workload, Schiff's comics were usually handled by a team composed of the editor himself (who gained the nickname "Schiff on skates" for his never-ending scramble to enforce deadlines), veteran Art Director Murray Boltinoff and copy-editor George Kashdan, with frequent assists by Weisinger. When Weisinger and Whitney Ellsworth left New York to work on the *Superman* program, still more responsibilities fell onto Schiff's shoulders. Perhaps for that reason, and perhaps because of the general malaise afflicting comics at the time, the mid-1950s saw a dip in the quality and pizzazz of his stable's work. The stories—scripted mainly by Dave Wood, Jack Miller, Eddie "France" Herron and DC veteran Bill Finger—grew less inspired. The art began to look rushed, and even artists who had made great names for themselves in years past—Mort Meskin, Alex Toth, Howard Sherman—were mere shadows

DC
10¢
TALES OF THE
UNEXPECTED
The ALIEN BRAT from PLANET BYRA
GREAT GALAXY! A REAL RAY-GUN, MOM!
THAT LITTLE IMP SWIPED MY WEAPON BELT TO PLAY WITH—AND I HAVE NO MEANS NOW OF DEFENDING MYSELF!

of their former selves. A certain sameness set in that took away even from more attractive art of Ruben Moreira, Lee Elias and Nick Cardy. (Much of the problem was a shortage of inkers: Charlie Paris, the stable's best, was unable to handle a sizable portion of the workload; the smooth Stan Kaye was busy with a great deal of work for Weisinger; while the mainstay, George Roussos, was kept too busy to produce good work.)

ADD OF TO THE BOOK!

After 1957, the solution for all such difficulties imposed by DC management was the same: Turn everything into science fiction. But in the case of the Schiff titles, the loosest possible definition of "science fiction" was imposed. His stories were forced to toss up a ceaseless parade of dinosaurs, monsters and aliens both bizarre and comical. Schiff hotly opposed this "monster craze", but to no avail. Because his comics were inherently more down-to-earth than most of Schwartz' and Weisinger's (and perhaps also because he resented the new craze), Schiff was unable to integrate the new elements into his stories as effectively as his fellow editors. In the four mystery titles, rather than juxtaposing the fantastic with the commonplace in the Fox-Broome manner, he and his writers tended to stick to the completely fan-

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WRITING FOR SYNDICATION

By James Van Hise

While outside the rare prime time animated special, new TV cartoons have been produced exclusively for the Saturday Morning market, some things are changing. Now along with the Forties Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Tom & Jerry, syndication is also proving to be a prime market for *new* material. *He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe* has become the first major America produced cartoon to try that route in a big way, although the Japanese produced *Star Blazers* went that route a couple years back.

But does producing films for syndication really mean more freedom? Certainly there is more freedom to create more episodes. The average Saturday morning cartoon show premieres with about 13 episodes and five new ones are made if it is renewed for a second season. The demands of successful syndication are such that 65 episodes of *He-Man* were produced for the package as it was aimed at a market where it would be shown five days a week, not just one day. And yet the same watchdog groups who have been hounding the producers of Saturday Morning fare have also had their eyes on the syndication market. This meant that *He-Man* could not do anything startling or unusual.

Mel Gilden is a new writer in the animation field. A graduate of the Clarion Writer's Workship of the early Seventies, he's had some stories published and is the weekly co-host on "Hour 25", KPFK's science fiction radio talk show. He's written one episode of *He-Man* and several for *Heathcliff*, the latest syndicated cartoon entry from Filmation.

Mel revealed that careful attention was paid to the actions in these cartoons from within the production company, more out of a fear of reprisals than anything else.

"This is because when Filmation decided to do He-Man, they went in knowing that the various TV watchdog groups would be watching He-Man very closely. It's a guy with a sword after all. He's basically Conan with magic. And so what Filmation did was impose their own standards. They hired a child psychologist and carefully went over each script to insure there wasn't anything in it to disturb anybody. So they wanted to forestall any problems that they might have had right at the source."

Mel broke in to writing cartoons through a friend who'd been writing them for quite awhile, J. Michael Reeves. But breaking in to cartoon writing isn't all that easy without someone to serve as an introduction. "For one thing, it's kind of a closed club. I suspect it's even more of a closed club than writing regular television."

He explained that the script for a cartoon, while looking the same as a TV script at first glance, is actually enormously different. "For one thing, when

you write for the movies or television the main thing they want to see is master shots. All of the intercutting with characters is up to the director. A one-hour TV script runs about 60 pages. The He-Man I wrote which was for a half hour time spot ran 42 pages. The main difference in the writing of it is that they don't want to see any master shots. They want you to be very specific about what you're looking at. You see angle He-Man, angle Teela, two shot angle He-Man and Teela. So the scripts are much longer because you're changing shots a lot more often.

"Theoretically, when you change shots, each of those changed shots is a different storyboard in itself. My understanding of it is that frequently the animator will ignore what the writer has done anyway because it doesn't work. I'm not aware of the animator's problems just as he's not aware of mine. It's a guide and if he doesn't have any other ideas of his own then he'll use the writer's, I'm sure. Dialogue pieces have to be very short. If it's more than three lines it better be a hell of a good piece of dialogue because these are mostly action shows. There's about 60% action and 40% dialogue and sometimes the proportion of action is even higher."

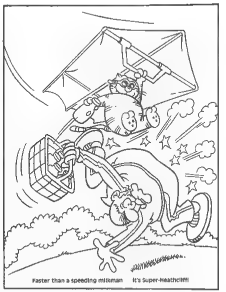
And then often the dialogue used is just to tell you what you're seeing, in case the audience can't figure it out for themselves.

"A lot of the dialogue that you write for cartoons is what I call TV dialogue. By this I mean that you do something, but before you do it or as you do it you say, 'Now I'm going to open the door.' Or else the heroes come upon a cave in the mountain and one of them says, 'Look, George, a cave.' All of this, of course, is entirely unnecessary except in the minds of the people who are producing these things and saying that the kids will not know what it is. That he will not know what is happening unless you tell him what's happening. So somebody says, 'Oh my god, a cave.' And somebody else says, 'Let's go in and take a look,' and somebody else will say, 'Maybe it's dangerous,' and 'Well, let's go in and look anyway.' Then they say, 'Here we go,' and they walk into the cave at last after this explanatory dialogue. In a movie like *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* they come upon a cave, look at each other and then go into the cave.

"I haven't been at this long enough to knock anybody's ideas about how these things ought to be made. Maybe you need that stuff. Maybe kids really don't understand. I don't know. But this is how they do it. You'll find this kind of dialogue in the adult shows at night, but not quite as much. One of the main differences between a movie of the week and a theatrical feature is that the theatrical features don't do that kind of dialogue as much."

Animated cartoons are they're own little corner of the world.

"They're fun to write," Mel continued, "but it's a real challenge because you're writing for a particular format and a particular story editor and everybody's got different ideas. There are problems. Some shows, especially network shows, are so locked in that first you have to deal with a story



Faster than a speeding milkman It's Super-Heathcliff!

editor, then you have to deal with an editor, then you have to deal with a producer, then maybe you have to deal with a sponsor and then maybe a network and then maybe the guy who invented the character. So you can deal with maybe five or six people before you get an OK for a story. And of course everybody's idea of what the perfect story should be is a little bit different and the overlap is very small and it's very difficult to sell to those places."

Another restriction which animation writers encounter is the need to use stock footage versus the creation of complicated new scenes which might never be able to be incorporated into the stock footage library.

"It varies from producer to producer," Mel explained. "They say, 'Well, we have this stock footage and we can only afford to do this many new scenes in this particular show.' Some producers will want to use a lot more stock footage. There are some who have entire stock footage libraries.

"When I wrote the He-Man, I put an elephant into it and I figured I could probably get away with an elephant because I knew that they had also done Tarzan and so they would probably have an elephant in the library, and

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STRIP SEARCH

MAX ALLAN COLLINS

FEARLESS FOSDICK
THE "IDEEL" COMIC STRIP DETECTIVE

LI'L ABNER by Al Capp
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY IN WASHINGTON
MAY I SPEAK WITH THE GENIUS?
GENIUS SPEAKING—
GENIUS!— THOSE VULTURES YOU SENT SURE GOT RID OF THOSE SPIDERS!— THE PROBLEM NOW IS— HOW DO WE GET RID OF THEM?
CHUCKLE!— I KNEW YOU'D BE ASKING THAT!— I'LL SEND OVER SOME OF MY VULTURE-EATING JACKALS!—
—AND WHEN THEY'VE EATEN ALL YOUR VULTURES, WE'LL SEND OVER SOME MAN-EATING TIGERS—
BUM!
TO GET THEM— AND THEN— ZZZ SHE HUNG UP!—
I'LL SELL THE FARM AND MOVE TO TIBET! THEY HAVEN'T ANY GENIUSES IN THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, HAVE THEY?
I DOUBT THE POOR SOULS EVEN HAVE AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY!—
HEE HEE
Al Capp

©News Syndicate Inc.

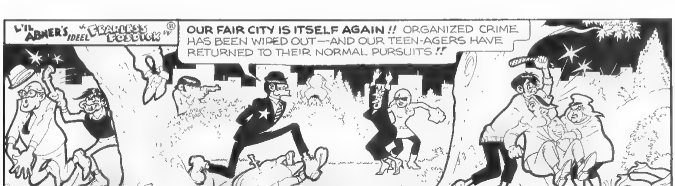
One of the questions most often asked of me, as the writer of *Dick Tracy*, is "how I feel" about Al Capp's Fearless Fosdick, his parody of Tracy that appeared as a strip-within-a-strip in *Li'l Abner* from 1942 till the parent strip's demise in 1977. In fact, next to "Where do you get your ideas," the Fosdick question is probably *the* question most asked of me—often by confused journalists who sometimes think Fosdick was a part of Tracy ("Why don't you start that Fearless Fosdick thing up again)"). (By the way, I usually recycle Chet Gould's seeming non-sequitur answer as to where I get my ideas: "That's what they pay me for.")

Yet another question often asked of me (I'm only momentarily ducking the main issue, I promise) is what my own personal favorite comic strip is. I usually answer *Tracy*, of course, though that isn't entirely true. *Tracy was* my favorite strip as a youngster, and remained one of my two or three favorites until I became a part of the strip in 1977; at which point *Tracy* became not only my favorite comic strip, but my favorite way of paying the phone bill and the electric bill, and my favorite way of buying the groceries and... well, you get the idea.

But if you're talking business and not pleasure—and if I am hard-pressed by an eager, sincere fan (or an eager, sincere deadline, like the one for this column), I might admit that there is a strip I like just as much as *Tracy*. Perhaps one I (—choke—) like even (—sob—) a little better.

And that strip is Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*. (My other favorite strip is Ham Fisher's *Joe Palooka*, which is another, albeit related, story—and one which will probably be told in this column before very long.)

Since I plan to discuss *Li'l Abner* itself at some later date, I'll pause only briefly to mention that Abner—in my


L'IL ABNER'S "IDEEL" FOSDICK FEATURE
OUR FAIR CITY IS ITSELF AGAIN !! ORGANIZED CRIME HAS BEEN WIPED OUT—AND OUR TEEN-AGERS HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR NORMAL PURSUITS !!
Capp

opinion the greatest of all American comic strips—has fallen into an undeserved disrepute due to the reported (and to a degree verified) misconduct of its creator. When Capp came out from behind his drawing board to be a public celebrity, he was at first welcomed, but eventually that welcome wore out. Part was due to his abrasive personality and a laugh that grew increasingly nervous and obnoxious as the years ground on. And, yes, Capp's shift from liberalism to conservatism cost him dearly. In the midst of a Yippie-era college tour during which he bemoaned the sorry state of the youth of today, particularly their lack of morals, Capp got caught up in a scandal allegedly involving the sexual harrassment of coeds. This left him painted a public hypocrite and branded a sex offender.

I remember saying to my wife, at the time, "the pen may be mightier than the sword, but it isn't mightier than the SDS." My instinct was that he'd been set up—and I heard rumors to that effect on the University of Iowa campus, where I was a student myself—but I also felt that in order to snap at such cheese, he must've been at least a little bit of a rat.

Still, I wasn't so much disappointed in Capp—anyone who had ever read *Li'l Abner* and didn't know by now that Capp (a) liked beautiful women, and (b) was cynical, was simply not paying attention—as I was disappointed in what seemed to me the inevitable fall from grace that *Li'l Abner* itself would suffer.

Abner had by the late '60s already fallen prey to Capp's own failing interest in the strip; many stories were reworkings of previous continuities, and most of the art was done by assistants and ghosts. And as newspapers continued to cut back the space allowed comics, Capp perversely refused to find acceptable ways to adapt—he made a point of having his characters bending over, squeezing themselves into the smaller panels by way of protest. This added to the public indignities Capp was suffering (even if those indignities were at least partially of his own making) made for sad latter days for a great American comic strip and its creator.

Abner was for many years the toast of the liberals and intellectuals; it was the *Doonesbury* of its day (often *Pogo* is given that distinction, but *Pogo* was never as widely read as Abner, probably because *Pogo* was not as easily accessible and, all due respect to the great Walt Kelly, never as funny). Abner spawned fads that took the nation by storm—the Shmoos were as big as anything Charles Schulz ever came up with, and Sadie Hawkin's Day is with us still. Capp made the cover of *Time*, and Abner and Daisy Mae's marriage made the cover of *Life*.

And from 1934 into the early '60s, Abner was the funniest, most intelligent comic strip of them all; not only was each day "amoozin' "—each was just "confoozin' " enough to bring you back the next day to see what happened next.

Because Abner was a prime example of a beast almost extinct today: the humorous continuity. No one made the humorous continuity do quite the things that Capp did; even Segar—the other master of the form—did not explore and stretch the confines of the medium to the extent of Capp.

Capp's primary conceit was to play Brechtian games with Abner—often. Abner flaunted its being a comic strip. The characters would sometimes go calling on Capp himself for help or advice, or even to bawl him out. Readers were invited to help Capp out of jams (the most famous example being the Lena the Hyena contest, in which Capp claimed not to be able to draw a picture as ugly as Lena's needed to be—reader Basil Wolverton came to the rescue, winning publicity for himself as well as for Capp and Abner). And Capp continually indulged in cliff-hangers so outrageous that Abner became a virtual parody of a comic strip.

And, inadvertently, that's what led to Fearless Fosdick.

In a Sunday episode in 1942, Abner first declared the "comical paper" hero Fosdick to be his "ideel". The Sunday page Abner was reading, however, lacked the final panel which presumably revealed how Fosdick escaped a Tracyesque death-trap involving explosives; Abner convinces the Scragg Brothers to place him in the

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LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

By Ron Goulart

CENTAUR DAYS PART III

AS SLIM AND LEFTY LEAVE, THE PROPRIETOR SPITS OUT IN DISGUST OR DISGUST.
HE'S CONFIDENT I'VE GOT THE FAIRGROUND!
THAT'S THAT FOR THE TIME BEING! NOW TO TAKE CARE OF THE OTHER TWO!!

Before we bid a fond farewell to the Centaur line, we'll take a look at one more of their diversified titles. *Amazing Mystery Funnies* came into existence in the summer of 1938 and expired, twenty four issues later, in the summer of 1940. During its relatively short life the magazine served as a home for a fluctuating cast of over two dozen different characters, including several science fiction heroes, plus a fellow who piloted a submarine that flew through the air, a superguy who lived under a fairground and a chap who was part horse.

Amazing Mystery was one of those publications with the annoying and confusing to many kids, habit of numbering its issues Volume 1 #2, etc. There were just four issues in the first volume, a full twelve in the second and eight in the third. Another unusual thing about the book was the fact most of the early issues ran only 48 pages. Not a generous measure in those days when a plump 64 pages was standard.

The first issue, in addition to being slim, offered a varied collection of features, a mix of reprints from earlier Centaurs, sweat shop leftovers and brand new stuff. The first important continuing character was Skyrocket Steele by Bill Everett. This was the earliest comic book work Everett, then in his early twenties, turned out. He was paid $2 a page. Skyrocket, whose real name was Steele Dodge, operated in the year X, "about 2500 A.D.". His companions included a pretty redhaired young woman named Sari and an invisible man known as Invex. His adventures were of the pulp magazine sort, involving future kingdoms and conflicts. Everett also produced two episodes of Dirk the

Demon, an sf strip starring a boy archaeologist in the 24th Century. Though both these features are passable, neither is anywhere near as well written or drawn as the sort of stuff, especially Sub-Mariner, that Everett would be doing a year or so later.

Also included in the first volumes are Air-Sub DX, a science fiction adventure about a future sub that was equally at home on land, sea and in the air, drawn by Carl Burgos; Daredevil Barry Finn, drawn by Tarpe (Miss Fury) Mills and dealing with a gentleman adventurer who had some pretty fantastic times; a series of seagoing yarns illustrated by the dependable Fred Guardineer. There was at least one contribution from Bert Christman, who later drew the *Scorchy Smith* newspaper strip, and work by Creig Flessel, Ed Moore and Art Pinajian.

In 1939 America held two world fairs,

ore in San Francisco and one in New Yerk. And that same year the Fantom of the Fair was born—"a new super thrilling strip! Packed with exciting action which takes place in a world fair." While the exact location of the dark-clad, hooded hero's activities was never specified in the copy, the backgrounds, including an occasional glimpse of the trylon and perisphere, make it clear his turf was the New York World's Fair. His duties were defined this way—"Deep under the fair grounds...the Fantom makes his abode. He is its protector, guarding it from the treachery of racketeers and other menaces." Included among those other menaces was a giant white gorilla who escaped his cage to run amok through the fair. The Fantom, with some changes and modifications in his outfit, was to be found in *Amazing Mystery* from the 11th through the 24th issue. For his final exploit there he called himself Fantoman. The original artist on the feature was Paul Gustavson, who made up with exuberance and tricky layouts for what he lacked in technical skill.

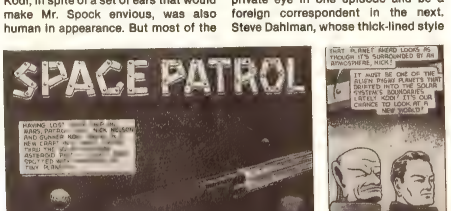
Beyond any doubt one of the dippiest characters to grace the pages of a Golden Age magazine was Speed Centaur. Part man and part horse, he was also the only hero to appear naked. The human front end of him wore not a stitch, neither did the equine back end. While not unusual behavior for centaurs, this did make Speed stand out from his comic book contemporaries. The creation of the minimally gifted Malcolm Kildale, Speed Centaur first galloped into view in the 12th issue (August, 1939). Usually teamed up with a reporter named "Reel" McCoy, he had some impressive escapades. There was the occasion when Reel helped him disguise himself as a carthorse and the time they found a lost civilization run along the lines of King Arthur's England. In this latter adventure Speed had quite a lot of fun jousting with some of the nastier knights. He stayed with the magazine until its demise.

Commencing with Volume 2 #12 Basil Wolverton, the nonpareil of wacky cartooning, began contributing a relatively straight science fiction saga dealing with the Space Patrol. All told he did an even half dozen wild episodes about "pilot Nick Nelson and his Martian gunner Kodi," whose job it was to police the solar system. Nick was a broadshouldered, darkhaired fellow who did his work in a green space suit and looked a good deal like Wolverton's later, better-known Spacehawk. Kodi, in spite of a set of ears that would make Mr. Spock envious, was also human in appearance. But most of the rest of the denizens of Wolverton's universe were either reptillian or resembled walking pickles.

Paul Cassidy, one of the earliest ghosts on Superman, made one appearance in the magazine. He drew Kern'l Kilgore, "a freelance veteran of most of the world's recent bigger and better fracases". Paul Lauretta, whose style looks to have been inspired in equal parts by Roy Crane and Joe Shuster, showed up once with Lieutenant Lank, also about a freelance fighting man—"a terror to the agressors, a savior to the oppressed."

Amazing Mystery relied as well on a couple of newspaper reprints to fill out some of the Issues. One of these was Don Dixon, the poor man's Flash Gordon, drawn by Carl Pfeuffer, that ran in six issues. The other was an obscure daily strip entitled Bill and Davey. Drawn by James McCague in an appealing cartoony style, this featured a plucky lad named Davey and his burly seagoing mentor Bill. Their adventures took place mostly on the high seas and tropic Isles.

Among the other features to be found in *Amazing Mystery Funnies* during its waning days were Jon Linton, Fantasy Isle and Larry Kane. Kane, known as "The Adventure-Hunter", was a versatile fellow who would act like a private eye in one episode and be a foreign correspondent in the next. Steve Dahlman, whose thick-lined style made you think he must've been influenced by linoleum block prints, was the artist. Fantasy Isle, as the title implies, was a fantasy. It was about a lad named Timmy Taylor who gets involved with prehistoric monsters as well as witchcraft and sorcery after being marooned on an island in the Pacific. Jon Linton, "flyer, scientist, adventurer," was a product of packager Harry Francis Campbell's shop. Operating in the early years of the 21st Century, Linton used his skills as a scientific genius to combat such fiends as Satan-Rex, a nasty chap "who threatens to destroy the Earth by hurling it into the path of the Sun."


SPACE PATROL
NICK NELSON
NOW I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING!
IT MUST BE ONE OF THE ALIEN PLANETS THAT SWIPPED INTO THE SOLAR SYSTEM UNEXPECTEDLY!
WELL, NOW IT'S OUR CHANCE TO LOOK AT A NEW WORLD!

Amazing Mystery ceased publication after Volume 3 #8 (September, 1940). Fantoman survived a bit longer in a shortlived magazine of his own and then he, too, was defunct.

MARVEL PRODUCTIONS

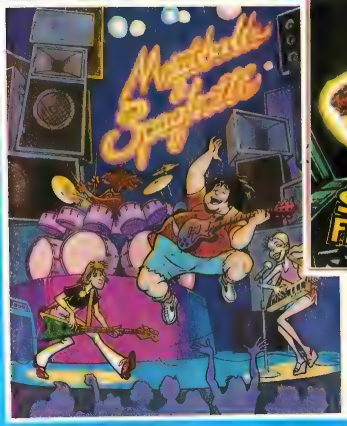
By Robert Strauss

All visual material was provided by Marvel and copyrighted by them. Individual characters may be the property of others and copyrighted by them.

In the summer of 1980, Marvel Entertainment Group president James E. Galton and Marvel Comics Publisher Stan Lee, the creator of such beloved comic book characters as The Fantastic Four, Thor, the Hulk and Spider-Man, traveled west from their New York corporate headquarters to establish an animation studio in Los Angeles, in conjunction with the Emmy and Oscar-winning animator David H. DePatie and his longtime production associate Lee Gunther. Galton and Lee formed Marvel Productions, Ltd. Lee remained in Los Angeles at the post of Creative Director for the new cartoon company. DePatie was named company President and Gunther became Vice President in charge of Production, the same position he'd held for a number of years prior to coming to Marvel at the DePatie-Freleng animation studio.

STAN LEE:

I am incredibly enthusiastic about the future because there is so much that we can do. We have so many ideas now, I don't know if we'll have time to develop them all.



Top left and top right Stan Lee. Center The Transformers. Bottom Right Meatballs and Spaghetti, Center Spider Friends. Next Transformers. Bottom right Pandemonium.

The primary reason why Lee and Galton wanted to start a production company was that they had been repeatedly disappointed with the ways in which other producers had portrayed the Marvel Comics characters in cartoons, live-action TV and feature films, and they felt they could do a more accurate job of bringing their characters to the large and small screen. Now, after four years, it's debatable whether or not Marvel Productions has yet achieved that goal. What is not open for question is the fact that, in those four short years, Marvel has established itself as one of the most successful suppliers of cartoon series to syndicated and Saturday morning network broadcasters, right behind the two giants of the industry, Hanna-Barbera and Ruby-Spears Productions. For anyone who watches cartoons or works in the animation field, Marvel has also developed a reputation as a house of quality, where more time, inventiveness and personal care is lavished on each project than at any other major television supplier.

Marvel's first project was a syndicated *Spider-Man* animated series. Ironically, this is probably the closest the company has come to capturing the spirit of a Marvel Comic. Since that time, Marvel has produced the highly-rated *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends* and *The Incredible Hulk* for NBC, *Dungeons and Dragons* and *The Muppet Babies* for CBS, *G.I. Joe, Jack London's White Fang, Transformers* and *Galavants* for syndication and numerous specials (their Dr. Seuss adaptation, *The Grinch Grinches the Cat in the Hat*, won an Emmy), commercials, comedy series and special projects. The company is also actively engaged in developing live-action projects, based on the Marvel superheroes, for film and television. From an initial staff of about 18 employees, the company now has approximately 140 in-house workers and 20 to 25 freelance people employed regularly on the outside.

In March of this year, a fire gutted Marvel's original production office. Operations were moved to a large, ultra-modern new facility, trimmed in Spiderman red and blue, that rises, like a modular Attilan, out of a busy industrial district of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley. It was here that

STAN THE MAN'S JOB

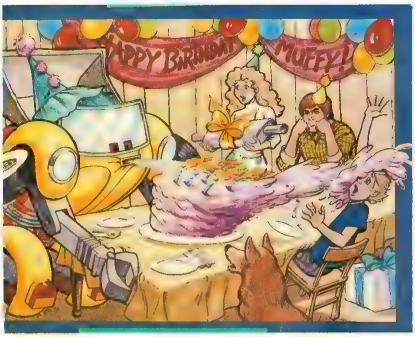
"I think, in the beginning, we were a little too naive. Coming out here, we learned that you cannot exert as much control as I'd hoped you could when you work with the networks," Lee told me in his corner office in what everyone at Marvel refers to as "The New Building". Like all the other offices, Lee's is unfinished: the doors have no handles, no permanent decorations have been fixed to the walls, the air conditioning never works quite right. But Lee himself is a marvel to behold: trim and wiry in his crisp new jeans and half-buttoned oxford shirt, this bright and energetic man, whose books I devoured voraciously for the better part of my childhood and who is probably old enough to be my, ah... grand-uncle, is nobody I'd relish running a 100-meter dash against.

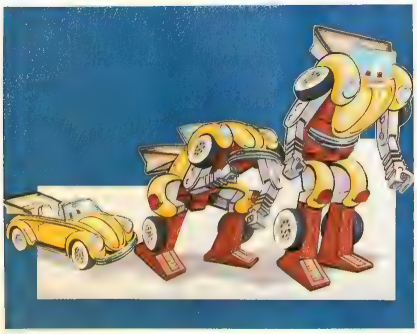
"It's really the network that exerts the control," Lee continued. "You want to sell to the network, you do it the network's way. As an example, it wasn't my idea to have Spider-Man as part of a team on the animated show with Iceman and Firestar, it wasn't my idea to have a funny little dog running around with them or for them to be living in a rooming house with Aunt May or for them to yell 'Go for it!' whenever they go into action. I wanted to do Spider-Man just the way he is in the comic books, but the network thought differently. The networks want an homogenized blend of characters

Margaret Loesch, a veteran Hanna-Barbera production coordinator and former head of children's programming for NBC, came to replace David DePatie as President of Marvel Productions when he retired last spring. Loesch's arrival, along with the new facility, herald a new commitment to bring the Marvel Comics characters to film and television with as much fidelity to the original source material as possible. For Stan Lee, the ongoing dream that he's nurtured since the 1940s when he began writing comic books, the dream of a world of fantasy and imagination coming ever-closer to life, is once again moving forward.

MARGARET LOEICH:

My job is to get Stan's ideas onto the screen, and that's what I will do. Just set up a great sandbox for him, let him create and I will sell it.





for each show. Their feeling was, in order to get the girls to watch the show, Spider-Man had to have a girl partner.

"Now, the one thing about Spider-Man is that he's a loner. God knows there are girls who read the Spider-Man comic books. But according to the network's demographics people, there had to be one girl, one boy, one dog and so forth. I'm not saying they're wrong. I'm sure they know their audience. But it does make it difficult to give the same spirit and the same appeal to a product that it has in the comic book form. I'm saying that it's not the way I would have wanted to do it."

Lee went on to explain that his complaints about network interference are not unique, that everybody from Aaron Spelling on down says the same thing from time to time. He then praised the competence of most network executives, and made clear that he understood that they based their decisions on what has and has not worked for them in the past, on demographics, research and audience surveys.

"My problem is, I've always based my decisions on hunch, instinct. I operated by the seat of my pants. I said to myself 'If I like this, there will be a lot of people out there who'll like it.' I always felt that if research and demographics are that infallible, there would never be a show that wasn't a hit. Because by the time a show gets put on the air, you can bet it's researched and demographiced to death."

Despite this and the other forms of interference that are the bane of all creative people who work in the broadcasting industry, Lee loves working in the film business. He describes his duties at Marvel Productions: "My main responsibility is to get some motion pictures and TV series going, based on the Marvel characters or on any new characters we create. I'm concentrating primarily on live-action, but I also try to help out as much as I can with the animated projects. I talk with film studios and producers. In the beginning, I narrated the *Hulk* and *Spider-Man* cartoon shows and set the formula for the way they would work. I don't actually write or story edit any of the shows because I don't have the time."

So far, Lee has struck a deal with Cannon Films to produce a live-action *Captain America* feature, and another one with King's Road Productions for

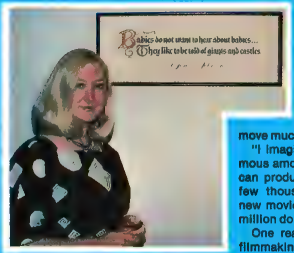
Dr. Strange. The Fantastic Four has been developed and then shelved by several studios, as has *The X-Men*. Famed independent producer Roger Corman currently holds the rights for a *Spider-Man* film, two networks have expressed interest in a live-action *Daredevil* series, and Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz, the crack screenwriting team repsonsible for *American Graffiti* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, are working on a script for *Howard the Duck*.

Keeping track of all of this activity, and constantly brainstorming and promoting new concepts, gives Lee little time to keep abreast of developments in the Marvel Comics universe. "I try to talk to Michael Hobson (Marvel's Vice-President in charge of Publishing) and Jim Shooter and the various editors as often as I can. Basically, even though I'm listed in each magazine as the Publisher, I'm really not involved in the day-to-day operation of the comic book company. I don't even have time to read all of the books as they're published, to my lasting regret. I did go to the original meetings with Mattel on the *Secret Wars* project, but I left the rest of it to Shooter and the staff in New York.

"I wish the people involved with the comic books had a greater degree of input on the film projects. I'm sure they wish they had more. But the logistics of it make it so difficult. They're in the East and we're out here in the West. I personally would like to call the guys in New York every time we have a new project, and I try to do that. Maybe if we were all together in the same studio, it would be easier, but as a practical matter, it really isn't easy to work together on projects.

"If there's a movie in the offing, we do try to get some of the fellows in New York to write outlines or treatments for it. Very often producers want to use their own writers, but we do it whenever we can. We tried with *The X-Men*. Chris Claremont worked with the producers for awhile, and now I believe Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway are working with them. With Spider-Man, a number of writers at Marvel, as well as myself, submitted some outlines to Roger Corman. I don't know if he has yet decided what the story should be.

"It's our hope that we'll work in very close cooperation as much as possible with Marvel New York in the future. If we do a show, they'll do a book, and we'll incorporate their ideas with our ideas."



Top left and right Margaret Loesch. Left center and bottom Muffy in Car and Cable. Bottom this page Dungeons and Dragons.

Lee went on to explain the differences that he's found exist between the comic book and film industries. "The biggest difference is that things were more instantly gratifying in the magazines. If you had an idea for a comic book, you just called an artist and said 'C'mon, let's do it together,' and three or four months later it was on sale. Here, you get an idea for a motion picture or a television series and it could be three or four years later and you're still trying to put it on the screen. So I've found that you need a lot more patience out here. Things move much, much slower.

"I imagine it's because of the enormous amounts of money involved. You can produce a new comic book for a few thousand dollars. To produce a new movie, you're talking about a few million dollars."

One reason for the higher cost of filmmaking is that many more people are involved in the production process. "On an animated cartoon, you have literally dozens and dozens of people who are doing storyboards, layouts, backgrounds, coloring, character design, scriptwriting, directing, producing. Then the actual animation is done overseas in Japanese, Korean and Belgian studios, by dozens of other people. For a comic strip, you have a penciller, an inker, scriptwriter, letterer, editor and colorist. You never have more than that.

"So it's a mass production line, just like any motion picture. It's a much more complex operation than doing a comic book. A comic book has ap-

(Above) Scott Shaw and Larry Houston, (Right) Will Meugniot at work. (Below) Bob Richardson.

proximately six panels to a page, times however many pages a story is. Whereas your average animated cartoon program, which lasts about 22 minutes, has got thousands of drawings. It's a different thing entirely.

"I find movie making and television producing enormously exciting. It's a big canvas. Whatever you do will be seen by millions of people, instantly. It has a big effect. I'm enjoying it very much, even though I do occasionally miss the comics.

"I am incredibly enthusiastic about the future because there is so much that we can do. We have so many ideas now, I don't know if we'll have time to develop them all. In all different directions: for network, syndication, cable, cassettes, features. Everything you could think of, we have ideas for ways to do it. I think this studio is going to become a very major force in animation, and may well go a few steps beyond that."

THE NEW PRESIDENT

Perhaps the person most responsible for making Lee's predictions come true is Margaret Loesch, Marvel Productions' new President. She has the experience that comes from being on both sides of the fence: For five years she was director of children's programs at NBC, the person responsible for the network's Saturday morning cartoon lineup, and for five years after that she was in charge of programming at Hanna-Barbera, where she supervised creation and development, selling of product, show production and oversaw the writing staff.

"Why did I come to Marvel?" Loesch asks rhetorically. "It's not every day a company comes along and offers you the top job. It's a wonderful opportunity and a challenge. I couldn't very well have turned to Joe Barbera at my last place of employment and said 'Could you move over? I'd like your job.' I also took this job because this company has an uphill battle. It's much smaller than Hanna-Barbera, it's only four years old, and it needed some fresh leadership, in the sense that the man who led it for several years was ready to retire.

"They have not been particularly successful in recent years at getting a Marvel Comics show off the ground. I am determined to get the Marvel characters out there in animation. I am a great fan of Marvel Comics and of Stan Lee. In fact, when I was at NBC we bought the *Fantastic Four* show that DePatie-Freleng produced. I'm working closer and closer with Stan all of the time. One of my goals is to get *The Secret Wars* on TV. I'm not so sure it's right for Saturday morning network, but however we do it, Stan will be consulted in the packaging and development of it. Additionally, we have a cable possibility which will feature Stan in live-action wraparounds, hosting some of our older cartoons. In addition, there are live-action, prime time shows I've asked him to develop new concepts which will be both animated shows and a new line of comic books.

"So I am really making an effort to get Stan Lee's touch more and more into the Marvel product. Thus far, I don't feel that the prior Marvel management was successful in bringing Stan into the operation and really utilizing him a lot. I think, frankly, that there was this very creative person and they didn't know what to do with him. The reason why, I believe, his comic books and his characters appeal to so many young people is that Stan is ten years old. His juices, his creativity is childlike, it has no boundaries. He's all over the place, has one hundred ideas a minute.

"He's very much in touch with what kids like and care about, not so much trend-wise as emotionally. He puts that in his characters, like The Silver Surfer, the lonely man without a country. He is absolutely in touch with people's sensitivities, and we've got to get that into the cartoons. It certainly was in his comic books.

"If I have a single fault to find with Stan, it's that he's too nice. Once I asked why the *Spider-Man* series didn't seem like the real thing. He said 'Well, y'know, some people wanted it this way and other people wanted it that way. Gee, I didn't think it was right, but I wanted to give them what they wanted.' Stan and Joe Barbera share this: they want to please the client, they want to do the right thing, sometimes to a fault. Sometimes, in trying to accomodate everybody, what they know to really be special gets lost in the evolution. But that's okay. My job is to get Stan's ideas on the screen and that's what I will do. Just set up a great sandbox for him, let him create and I'll sell it."

Along with her determination to keep Stan Lee's vision intact, Loesch also intends to build a bridge across the troubled gulf between creative people and network executives. "There is a great cry in the creative industry today that the networks are ruining our product, and there are a lot of examples of that. But having been at two networks for a total of ten years, and having been with a major producer, I think I'm a little more objective on the issue. If I make a single contribution to this industry, aside from increasing the quality of the product, I'd like it to be diminishing that rivalry between broadcaster and producer. Because it's

become counter-productive, and in some cases it's totally adversarial.

"We (the producers) don't have airwaves. We must partner ourselves with something like a network or a syndicate that has the capability to broadcast our product. Marvel Comics is both the creator and to a large extent the broadcaster of its product, but our situation's totally different. Also, in the comic book world, if Stan got an idea and wanted to create a comic book, the company had the financial resources to pay for it.

"Producing television shows is incredibly expensive. We can't afford it, so the networks pay us. When someone pays for anything, they buy certain rights, among them the right to put what they want on the air. So there is a series of creative compromises that are made. Sometimes they're very good. I have seen, in my experience, an idea greatly enhanced by working it through and with the networks. The result was a stronger, better product. On the other hand, I've seen good ideas completely compromised because too many people's needs have been satisfied, the things got watered down and wound up bearing very little resemblance to what they started as.

"I think I understand the problems of network executives. I understand they buy a product for more than one reason. What they are primarily concerned with, in addition to the quality of a show, is the competitive positioning of that show so that it will accrue the maximum potential audience. Also, when you're a broadcaster, you're responsible to answering to the public (such as the Action for Children's Television people, the largest of many groups that monitor the levels of violence on Saturday morning TV), as well as for meeting the needs of your own company financially. Sometimes, you can't always buy the kind of programming you want because of financial limitations.

"Knowing that, I think it both helps me give the networks more of what they want, while at the same time, as a producer, it helps me to figure out ways of keeping the essence of what makes a concept or project work within the program."

Loesch went on to describe a bit of what she thinks the networks look for in a show. They tend to like shows

Continued on page 43

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tunity to roll dice and see if the hero hit and did damage. This player will eventually get bored, and either stop playing or look for more out of the game. If he looks seriously, he will find that there is a lot more to be found, particularly if the gamemaster is interested in providing a good time for his players.

A good gamemaster will provide room for characterization, snappy repartee between heroes and villains, and even moments of humor and pathos within the scenario. Any superhero gamemaster is probably a frustrated comic book writer, and he should take the opportunity of running the games to hone his skills. Who knows, a successful series of adventures that leaves the players asking for more this year might give the gamemaster ideas that lead to a series in *New Talent Showcase* next year.

On the other hand, most comics professionals who have seen the games think they are interesting, but they already have an outlet for their creativity. They don't want to waste their inspiration on a game when they could be getting paid for it.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

I missed Fantasy Games Unlimited's *Villains & vigilantes* scenario, *The Dawn of DNA* the last time around. The plot revolves around the diabolical Dr. DNA's attempts to control the world through his zombie pills. This is not a scenario for Eclipse's DNAgents, though players who use the statistics published for everyone's favorite artificial life forms in *Different Worlds #34* will probably have fun using them against Dr. DNA's machinations.

TSR Inc.'s Marvel Super Heroes X-Men module *The Breeder Bombs* and their judge's screen with *A Hero's Guide to New York* both show that Jeff

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Grub is determined to have fun with the game. He shows a good knowledge of the Marvel universe and the proper spirit toward the characters. The X-men module takes the current team (including both Lockheeds) up against Magneto and a plot to release radioactivity into the air to increase the number of mutants. However, in line with the current doctrine on Magneto, the actual perpetrator is a fake and Magneto is a good guy after all.

The "Guide" to New York is just like any other tourist brochure, except for mentions of Avengers Mansion and SHIELD HQ. The best parts of it are the briefing sheets "attached" to the brochure, one on SHIELD and one on "subversive" organizations in New York. It's fun stuff, though two pages may not be much inducement to buy it, like me, you have no use for judge's screens and a complete collection of *The Handbook to the Marvel Universe*.

The Marvel Game miniatures are out, with one box issued as of this writing and another eighty miniatures done, according to the sculptor. Some of the figures are quite useful, but others do not inspire me at all. The anthropoid Thing, whose knuckles could drag on the ground, and the pancake-like Mr. Fantastic are not inspiring figures. The Spider-man figure's dynamic pose jumping over a wall does not look proper on a playing mat.

The latest Marvel game module as of this writing is *Time Trap*. It is an

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Avengers module which takes them back in time to interfere in several of the more notable battles in Marvel history, and provides too many *deus ex machinas* for my liking. The poor Avengers are given almost no chance of figuring out what's happening until the solution is handed to them on a platter. Despite using the current team, the adventure reads more like late-sixties and early-seventies Avengers, not a very inspired period.

The new *Avengers Assemble* module is very useful for any MSG gamemaster, as it lists all the members of the Avengers for use anywhere. One

slight error probably has Denny O'Neil and Mark Gruenwald gnashing their teeth. Author Bruce Nesmith, no doubt acting on information supplied by Marvel, has Tony Stark wearing the Iron Man armor. This blows the lid off the "Who will end up with the armor?" question which currently occupies the Iron Man plotline and may still be doing so when you read this.

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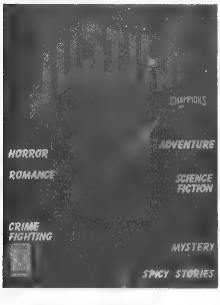
Just out from TSR is *Murderworld*, which I have yet to get a copy of. It deals with the machinations of Arcade, as you might expect from the title.

Hero Games' current release is a followup on their *Justice Inc.* 1930s



role-playing game. *The Trail of the Gold Spike* is an adventure based in the not-yet-tamed West of the 1920s and '30s, and is meant for lots of Doc Savage-style action. Coming up is *Enemies III*, their third compilation of supervillains, edited this time by Dennis Mallonee, author of Hero's earlier *Great Supervillain Contest*.

As of this writing, Mayfair Games promises the DC role-playing game within 12 weeks, along with four modules. The design staff, on the other hand, feels it will be out at the annual hobby show in January. We will see if Marketing or Design win this round of the perpetual battle between the need for perfection and the need for sales. Developer Greg Gordon says that the game aims for the middle range of complexity—somewhat like Victory Games' *James Bond—007* game. It will allow for the creation of a player's own hero.

Unlike TSR's determination to keep all aspects of the Marvel game in house, Mayfair (a much smaller company) is actively seeking freelancers. Among noteworthy game designers signed on to do modules are Dave Arneson (co-author of the original *Dungeons and Dragons*), Mike Stackpole (designer of *Mercenaries, Spies and Private Eyes*) and Ray Greer of Hero Games.

The actual game will include a book of rules, a solitaire module featuring the Teen Titans (mentioned last column) and an introductory scenario featuring the same team. Marv Wolfman was looking at these in early September. There will also be descriptions of fifteen well-known heroes and fifteen well-known villains to be used in scenarios created by the players.

Coming out shortly after the game debuts will be Mike Stackpole's background book and scenario featuring the Batman.

I look forward to just what Mayfair will do with this license and access to the whole DC Universe.

EVERYBODY'S GETTIN' INTO THE ACT

England's Games Workship, producers of the Judge Dredd game, are coming out with a superhero game called *Golden Heroes*. Representatives had a copy of the cover available at the annual GenCon game show in middle August.

Steranko fans might want to spend $15.00 to pick up *Heroes Unlimited* by Palladium Books. The game debuted at GenCon and the cover by Steranko is at least equal in quality to the covers he did for *The Fly* 1 and 2. Having read the rules, I can't think of any other reason to buy it. It does have the virtue of providing a superhero game which can be directly translated to AD & D, which the TSR Marvel game cannot.

Ragnarok Publishing (publishers of the semi-pro magazine *Abyss* and the Ysgarth role-playing system) is supposed to have a superhero game on the way. No sign of it so far.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Fantasy Games Unlimited, P. O. Box 182, Roslyn, NY 11576

Chaosium Inc., P. O. Box 6302, Albany, CA 94706

TSR, Inc., P. O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147

Mayfair Games Inc., Box 5987, Chicago, IL 60680

Paladium Books, 5669 Casper Ave., Detroit, MI 48210

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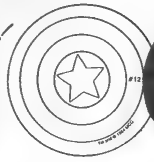

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tastic. Stories hurtled from one explosive event to another—from battle to chase scene to battle again—without the complexity he had always prized. The mindlessness of the featured monsters also precluded the characterization and interesting motivation Schiff valued. Thus the pages were soaked in such dialogue as, "The Shrawthca is senselessly destroying everything in its path!" (TU 54, Oct. 1960). Such stories could often thrill the little kids of the late '50s—for Schiff's artists produced the most toothsome and colorful monsters ever in comics—but with time they became sadly repetitive.

These elements were much more successful when incorporated into a series from its inception than when slapped on reluctantly afterward. Space Ranger, born of the same editorial conference that created Adam Strange in 1957, epitomized the colorful, exotic, childlike slant of Schiff's science fiction as charmingly as Adam epitomized Schwartz's more complex approach. The ingenious, fantastic imagination of new writer Arnold Drake set the tone. The series told of the adventures of future policeman Rick Starr as he patroled our Solar System, a constellation of planets, moons and asteroids populated by colorful alien creatures. Operating out of his asteroid headquarters, Space Ranger was aided by his girlfriend, Myra, and a pink,

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scrappy, little alien shape-changer named Cryll. Neatly and attractively drawn by Bob Brown, these light, pleasant stories ran in *Tales of the Unexpected* from 1959 to 1964 (TU 40-82), after his trial in *Showcase* issues 15 and 16 (Aug.-Oct. 1958).

Less colorful, and less successful, was Tommy Tomorrow. Created by Schiff and Welsinger in 1947 (for their educational *Real Fact Comics*) as a forum for real scientific speculation, Tomorrow was transformed during the 1950s into a minor back-up strip about an interstellar police force called the Planeteers. The stories (mostly by Jack Miller) avoided bug-eyed monsters in favor of little mysteries, but uninspired scripting and muddy Jim Mooney art kept Tommy trudging along in the back of *Action* and *Adventure*. Some try-outs in *Showcase* (41, 42, 44, 46, 47; 1962 and 1963) with Lee Elias art were fun, but came to naught.

BUT ON BATMAN?

The greatest problem of the stable in those years was not at all with the science fiction comics themselves, but with the effect the craze had on other titles. For under an indiscriminate DC editorial policy, Batman was made to suffer through the strangest days of his career.

When created by Bill Finger and Bob Kane in 1939, the Batman was a dark-night avenger of crime in the pulp-magazine tradition of the Shadow and the Spider. Soon he picked up the comics' original kid sidekick, Robin the Boy Wonder, along with a utility belt full of remarkable gadgets and a subterranean Batcave housing scientific criminological devices and such sleek vehicles as the Batmobile and the Batplane. Yet through it all Schiff kept him to the eerie shadows of the city, hunting down murderers and thieves. During the early 1950s Batman and Robin spent more and more time travelling the world and donning exotic disguises. Their adventures still remained squarely in the realm of what was plausible for a costumed master-sleuth without super-powers. But beginning in 1957 (and accelerating after Ellsworth's retirement the next year, when Schiff lost an ally of great integrity and consistency), science fiction came to Gotham City, and during the next few years the Dynamic Duo went haywire.

No longer would Batman match wits with such colorful psychotics of urban gangland as the Joker, the Catwoman and the Penguin. First it was a thug armed with an "energy radiator" from the planet Skar (Det. 250, Dec. 1957), then the winged bat-people from another dimension (Bat. 116, June 1958), next Garr of Planetold X (Bat. 117, Aug. 1958). Within three years Batman found himself embroiled with so many aliens and weird creatures that on one cover he was driven to remark, "Great Scott! Another bizarre creature with a fantastic weapon!" (Det. 287, Jan. 1961).

Some new costumed villains were created for him, but they were nearly all

In the pattern of the Fox, the Shark and the Vulture, a trio of renegade inventors who used wild devices and animal-like get-ups in place of the personal lunacies that had made the old villains so intriguing (Det. 253, Mar. 1958).

Suddenly Batman and Robin were wrenched from their world of dark alleys and rooftops and hurled to other dimensions and distant solar systems. As the distortions of his mythos accelerated, Batman found that he himself was subject to weird transformations. Beginning with "The Merman Batman" (Bat. 118, Sept. 1958), in rapid order he became an invisible man, a Zebra Batman, a robot, a Negative Batman, an alien, a baby, a "colossus", a mummy and the "bizarre Batman Genie".

To add to the confusion, Schiff began populating the comics with a burgeoning "Batman family", evidently in emulation of the growing supporting cast of Superman. The first, from 1955, was Ace the Bat-Hound, inspired by Superboy's dog, Krypto. He was a generic-looking dog who battled criminals wearing a black mask over his eyes, presumably to prevent thugs from recognizing him and striking at him through his loved ones. A year later followed Batwoman, a fairly original creation, as Supergirl's debut still lay three years ahead. Bat-Girl arose in 1961, with the primary role of kissing Robin on the cheek and making him blush. And briefly in 1958 there was even a Bat-Ape, testament to DC's all-pervasive love of simians (on any given month we were bound to find either Flash's enemy Grodd, Superman's foe Titano, Superboy's pet Super-Monkey, the back-up feature Congorilla, or one of the dozens of gorillas who swung through the science fiction comics). The most extravagant new cast-member was Bat-Mite, an interdimensional imp modelled on Superman's pesky Mr. Mxyzptlk. Beginning in 1959, Bat-Mite, took to dressing like a sloppy, midget Batman and kicking off wacky adventures under the guise of trying to help his crime-fighting idol. Instead of keeping company only with the night, Batman and Robin thus found themselves beseiged by a Bat-Family whose gay demeanor and colorful attire destroyed the atmosphere of the shadows.

In 1962 and 1963 Schiff brought back the Penguin, Mirror Man and some of his other old villains. He also pointed

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to the booming sales of his *Eighty-Page Giant Batman Annuals*, composed of reprints from the 1950s, as proof that kids didn't demand an exclusive diet of monsters, despite what the B-movies suggested. "I believe that there is such a thing as developing tastes in children," he says, "instead of just succumbing to them." Eventually his superiors would see his side, and another editor would be allowed to do what he was not (to great effect, for Schiff's idea of reviving the old villains would lead to Batman becoming a popular mania in the mid-1960s). But for now they kept serving up stories of creatures and weird transformations until the children themselves began turning their backs.

While the stories grew more harebrained, the art became steadily more crude and childlike, reduced to page after page of simple figures pressed into small, repetitive panels. The great bulk of the stories were drawn by Bob Kane, Batman's principal creator and original artist (he was sometimes aided by "ghosts", such as Phil Kelsey, although many fan/historians—perhaps perplexed by the fact that all the Batman stories were signed "Bob Kane", regardless of the actual artist—have greatly exaggerated their role). Kane's figures had always been stiff and his faces rather crude, but over twenty years of drawing the same series he had gradually reduced his characters to mere ciphers of human beings. Nonetheless, his work often showed a rough, juvenile vitality, and his aliens could be genuinely amusing. Now and then, when Schiff, the writers, and Kane put no fetters on their flights of imagination, they created tales so inventive and exotic that even their rough execution was made charming.

WORLD'S FINEST

These virtues shone brightest in the title Schiff called his "pet baby", *World's Finest Comics*, which held three advantages over *Batman* and *Detective*. First, it was there that Schiff thought of teaming Batman regularly with Superman, whose fantastic nature made their outlandish adventures believable. Second, it enjoyed several scripts by a master of space adventure, Edmond Hamilton. And third, most importantly, it was drawn from 1955 to 1961 by Dick Sprang. Although working in the same small-figured, childlike style as Bob Kane, Sprang brought into his panels a unique wit and dynamism capable of breathing life into the most far-fetched story. To this he added a caricaturist's ability to give all his miniature figures a sense of character and personal charm, while his backgrounds exceeded all others' in detail.

In one intricate, colorful gem of a tale, a beast of living fire terrorizes the picturesque Mediterranean. The quest of Batman, Robin and Superman to find the key to defeating it leads from a distant planet of odd geometric forms, through the bustling streets of ancient Greece, to exquisite miniature landscapes in the Egypt of the Pharaohs (WF #107, Feb. 1960). Another story finds a charming little alien movie producer unleashing three of the most peculiar creatures ever conceived by a comic book artist—one looks like a giant smirking golf tee, issuing from its head a floating roadway along which scurry an army of tiny robots—and filming our heroes' battle with them for his next extravaganza (WF #108, March 1960).

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When Sprang left DC in 1961, his successor, Jim Mooney, was unable to sustain the same charm, and the title grew gradually stale.

OTHER HEROES: AN ARCHER AN AQUAMAN AND AN ALIEN

While Batman struggled along, three other old super-heroes in the Schiff stable were afflicted with problems not quite so outrageous but also, unfortunately, not as interesting. Green Arrow and Aquaman were the first comic creations of Mort Weisinger; the Martian Manhunter was a product of 1950s science fiction; but all three, until 1962, were only back-up series in other superhero comics.

Green Arrow began in 1941 as a modern-day Robin Hood, foiling thugs with his masterful archery, but quickly became a Batman imitation. In his secret identity as Oliver Queen, he was, like Bruce "Batman" Wayne, a wealthy socialite, and was joined in his adventures by his ward Roy Harper, who was secretly his boy sidekick Speedy. There was an Arrow-Cave, an Arrow-Plane and an Arrow-Car, and Green Arrow sported a quiver of trick arrows with as many surprises as Batman's utility belt. Although an occasional Lee Elias or Jack Kirby guest-shot perked the art up a little, the strip was usually blandly drawn by George Papp, a stiff, undistinguished penciller. It ran for years in *Adventure* and *World's Finest*, but, not surprisingly, never graduated to its own title.

Aquaman, also from 1941, was a "Sea King" who communicated telepathically with fish, a variant of the old Timely Comics' popular Sub-Mariner. It was a limited premise but handled with a little more imagination than Green Arrow. Aquaman, also assisted by a boy sidekick, in this case Aqualad, solved many short mysteries surrounding smugglers, modern-day pirates and occasional mad scientists. His adventures were drawn by Ramona Fradon, a competent penciller whose attractive, distinctive inking lifted the look of the series above the usual run of back-up features. Aquaman was apparently more popular than Green Arrow because in 1962 (after runs in *Adventure* and *Detective*) he began in his own title, where the stories grew longer but were not plagued by more monsters.

The youngest and best of the three was the Martian Manhunter, developed by Schiff and writer Joe Samachson for *Detective Comics* in 1955. Accidentally brought to Earth by a scientist, J'Onn J'Onzz was a big, green, beetle-browed humanoid with the ability to shift shape. In his early adventures he fought crime by adopting different appearances, but soon he was limited to one secret identity, police detective John Jones, and to battling thugs with an array of Superman-like powers: Martian Strength, Martian Breath, Martian Vision and others in the same vein, plus the ability to elongate his body.

J'Onn J'Onzz, unlike other super-heroes of his time, had no boy sidekick, but after seven years he was joined by a semi-intelligent inter-dimensional pet named Zook (Det. #311, Jan. 1963). With his cartoonish face, super-pliable orange body, "highly sensitive antennae" and baby-talk, Zook brought a lighter and more fanciful element into the Manhunter's adventures. This element became dominant when the pair traded their back-up spot in *Detective Comics* for a short-lived starring role in *House of Mystery* (HOM #143, June 1964 and after). The secret identity of John Jones was abandoned as the two spent their time battling the creations of the magical idol Head of Diabolu, including such odd, dreamlike images as an orchestra of living musical instruments and a hole cut out of the sky as if out of a wooden dome, leading to a world above the stars. The regular creative team on the strip was writer Jack Miller and artist Joe Certa. Although not exhibiting any great artistic flair, they imbued J'Onn J'Onzz with a colorful charm that causes him to linger in fond memory.

NON-SUPER HEROES

In addition to his mystery-turned-science-fiction titles and pre-Silver Age heroes, Schiff edited two comics not created by regular DC staffers. (He also handled a number of other series, such as Congo Bill, Roy Raymond and Tomahawk.) The first of the two was Blackhawk, about a team of World War

HOUSE of MYSTERY
THE NEW TONZZ, FROM MARS
THE MAKER!
THE THING FROM THE IDOL-HEAD OF DIABOLU CAUSED ME TO LOSE MY MARTIAN POWERS AND HAS TURNED MY PAL, ZOOK, INTO A DESTRUCTIVE GIANT

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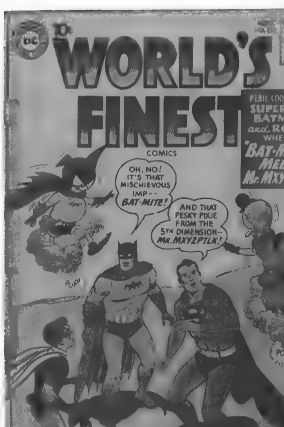
WORLD'S FINEST
COMICS
PERIL LOOMS WHEN SUPERMAN, BATMAN and ROBIN MEET...
BAT-MITE MEETS Mr. MXYZPTLK!
OH, NO! IT'S THAT MISCHIEVOUS IMP--- BAT-MITE!
AND THAT PESKY PIXIE FROM THE 5TH DIMENSION--- Mr. MXYZPTLK!
POW

© DC Comics

II aviators, which DC bought from the Quality Comics Company in 1956. Superficially, the Blackhawks retained some of their Golden Age look, primarily through artists Chuck Cuidera and Dick Dillin, who had drawn them since the 1940s and came to DC with the title's sale. But at heart they were completely changed. Named after their intrepid leader, Blackhawk, they were originally formed as a band of aerial gladiators, a potpourri of allied nations—including a Frenchman, a Swede, a Dutchman, a Texan, a Chinese and a Pole—who spearheaded the battle against the Nazi menace with no more than small planes, automatic pistols and valor. At the end of the war the team lost its basic purpose and languished for a decade, mopping up die-hard Nazis and tangling with communists.

When DC took charge, their basic purpose faded completely from sight as the Blackhawks found themselves beleaguered by the usual store of monsters and aliens. Where the once-proud defenders of freedom had let sound their battlecry, "Hawk-a-a-a", now they could paraphrase their fellow unfortunate, Batman: "Great Scott! The eight-limbed Octi-Ape has escaped from the spaceship and has grabbed Chop-Chop!" (BH 152, Sept. 1960). Meanwhile, Dillin and Cuidera's art slipped far below the standard it had maintained into the 1950s, as they were forced to spend their talents on a menagerie of cartoonish beasts.

Unique among the DC comics of the time was the second title, *Challengers of the Unknown*, as it was created, drawn and often written by a single man, freelancer Jack Kirby. It fit the basic mold of monster-filled science fiction demanded then, but Kirby's pugnacious drawings, rapid storytelling and grand imagination raised it a notch above the usual and made it thoroughly his own.

Jack Kirby stands as one of the great independent spirits of comic book history. Since the beginning of the Golden Age he had been perhaps the most seminal and productive action-artist in the field. He and his partner Joe Simon had created Captain America for Timely Comics in 1941, started a number of war-time features for DC, and then formed their own firm for the production of comics to be sold to a variety of publishers. They created the first romance comics and pioneered the genre of "boy gang" adventures. Kirby, himself a product of the tough streets of New York's Lower East Side, built a reputation as the premier artist of two-fisted action, heroic musculature and fisticuffs that fairly flew off the page. He was also an artist who rebelled against working to someone else's assignments, and so he and Simon rarely stayed long with any publisher. In the mid-1950s they dissolved their partnership to go out and peddle

I'M GOING HERE ALL SHOT TO HOT!
AND INTO THAT MAELSTROM HUNTERS! FIND OUT WHAT THAT THING IS—HOW WE CAN BEAT IT!
AMONG SWIRLING MISTS AND LIGHTNING BOLTS THEY SHOULD SEE! THEY'RE THERE! THEY'RE THERE! THE BEAST! THE MONSTER! BUT WAIT, THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE! THE MONSTER AND THE GIANT AMOEBA ARE ONE!
IT'S REALENOUGH TO BE WHAT ELSE, BUT DO WE KNOW?
THE HORRIBLE THING SPLITS APART! A WEIRDO TRY! A BIG BLOB! YOU CAN W THROW!
WE'LL TRY TO BE BACK BEFORE THE FIRST ATOMIC BOMB EXPLODES!
THEY'RE HAMMOND SKY EFFECT! THEY'RE GONE! IT'S UP TO US! STAND BY FOR ACTION!

© DC Comics

their own creations alone.

Away from Simon, Kirby's imagination took a turn for the science fictional and grandiose, a turn that brought him favorable reactions from the powers at DC. From the days of his boy gang titles he carried a love of the manly camaraderie, team spirit and rough-and-tumble action of street fights and school football. Fused together, his fascinations sparked the Challengers, a team of four rugged adventurers who give their lives over to battling dangers from "out there—Places we cannot see! Things we fear to touch! Sounds that do not belong to this world! Riddles of the ages lurking beyond the bridge without a name!"

Wrestler Rocky Davis, skindiver Prof Haley, circus daredevil Red Ryan and crew-cut jet pilot Ace Morgan are flying through a storm when the controls jam and their plane plummets to the earth. By some miracle, all four crawl away from the crash alive. "We should be dead," says Red, "but we're not!" "We're living on borrowed time," says Ace, and the four of them throw in together to tackle exploits more risky than any they have dared before (*Showcase #6*, Feb. 1957).

From Kirby's imagination poured such off-beat dangers as a sorcerous descendant of Merlin the Magician and an outer-space child who wants to keep the Challengers as pets. Even when relying on the device of an alien invasion of Earth, he gave us not the usual monster but a vast army of trained technological conquerors with a complex plan of attack (*Showcase #11*, Dec. 1957). His art, very tight and forceful in action sequences, highly inventive with alien landscapes and machinery, gave punch to his suspenseful plots. Much of the art was further aided by inker Wally Wood who, as both a penciller and inker for the deceased EC comics line, had been a highly influential science fiction artist in the early 1950s. Kirby's faults—a complete lack of character in his scripting and rough-hewn quality to much of his drawing—were overshadowed by his vitality. He also took a liberty nearly unknown in those days of two, three and four-story comic books, in allowing some of his stories to fill the full twenty-four pages of the magazine. It was a liberty he would carry over to his next publisher, to great effect.

True to form, Kirby shortly grew dissatisfied with producing the Challengers for DC. After issue eight of their own title (May 1959) he departed for other pastures. Schiff and his writers, with Bob Brown as penciller, maintained the series at a fun level, but Kirby's verve and vision could not be replaced.

That the Challengers were a commercial success is evidenced both by the fact that they went from *Showcase* to their own title in early 1958, and by the appearance of two similar adventure team comics in 1959 and 1960. Rip Hunter, Time Master, blessed with superb art by the likes of Joe Kubert, Mike Sekowsky and Nick Cardy in his early appearances, was the leader of a gang of time-travellers who had fast-paced and historically accurate adventure in different eras. Schiff reports that he and writer Jack Miller had "lots of fun" on the series, and it shows in the brisk storytelling. Rip graduated his try-outs (SH. 20-21 and 25-26, June-Aug. 1959 and Apr.-June 1960) to his own title (Apr. 1961), but it lost much of its early beauty when Bill Ely became the regular artist. Less successful was Cave Carson: Adventures Beneath the Earth, about a squad of star-crossed speleologists, which, although also boasting some Kubert artwork, never got beyond *The Brave and the Bold* (beginning BB 31, Sept. 1960) and *Showcase*. Suicide Squad and Sea Devils were other variations on the theme.

THREE COMPANIES IN ONE

Clearly, by the beginning of the 1960s, the editorial styles of Weisinger, Schwartz and Schiff had gone in such different directions that DC functioned essentially as three companies instead of one. Not only did each editor have his own titles and approach, but a stable of writers and artists who worked almost exclusively for him. Of the three, Schiff was the only one whose main character, Batman, had suffered from the changing times. No doubt here was a case of a craze gone too far: For the science fiction that had worked for Flash and Superman had brought about Batman's downfall, and the stable that had arguably been DC's best was beaten silly by a thoughtless company policy.

The elements forced on Schiff in those years clearly did not suit the conventional hero. But new trends were coming, accompanied by redistributed editorial chores that would allow Schiff and his associates to develop new creations well-suited to their talents and make a unique contribution to the progress of comic books.

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Continued from page 15

L'IL ABNER'S IDEAL "FEARLESS FOSDICK!"
("POOR FOSDICK!! HE IS NOW A STARVIN' BUM!!")
TICK TICK
("BECAUSE THE WORLD REGARDS HIM AS A NUT. BUT I KNOW HE AIN'T.")
("HE REALLY DOES HEAR THAT WATCH TICKING! IT'S INSIDE HIS HEAD, WHERE I TOSSED IT")
TICK TICK
("WHILE HE WAS UNDER ETHER DURIN' BRAIN SURGERY")
FEARLESS!? SO, AT LAST YOU HAVE COME TO TAKE ME TO DINNER, ?!
CRAIG CHAPPEL

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same predicament, so he can figure out how Fosdick escaped—and is promptly blown up. Later he discovers another copy of the Fosdick Sunday page and finds that Fosdick had only been dreaming.

Capp delighted in such comparisons between the "real" world of Abner, and the "comical strip" world of Fosdick. And he soon began developing Fosdick as a full-fledged Tracy satire, using Gould-grotesque villains (like Stone-Face and Anyface), signing the strip "Lester Gooch" (in a parody of both Gould's name and his signature) and even developing a cast of characters (including Prudence Pimpleton, Fosdick's long-suffering girl friend who was herself a parody of Tracy's fiancee Tess Trueheart).

Capp went so far as to make Lester Gooch himself a character in the strip. By the late '40s, Gooch's sanity (or lack thereof) had become a running gag in Abner, and from this premise Capp assaulted his chosen medium as well as his audience. Gooch's boss, the chief of an unnamed comics syndicate examines the first strips drawn by Gooch upon his release from a sanitarium: "These new 'Fearless Fosdick' strips are *no good*! They're obviously the work of a *normal, decent human being*!" A syndicate yes-man chimes in: "Gooch has regained his sanity—but *lost his touch*!!" The syndicate boss kicks the originals around the office saying, "*Bah!!*—just *People*, murdering *people*!! Nothing *exciting*—nothing *unusual*!! *No* real American kid could get interested in *this* namby-pamby stuff!!"

Such basically nasty, cynical philosophy is leavened by Capp's wit and his willingness to take himself on as a target. Earlier Abner himself had worried about Gooch's release; Daisy Mae wonders why Gooch being pronounced sane isn't good news to Fosdick-fanatic Abner, who explains, "Yo' just don't realize what a handy-cap bein' *sane* is to a cartoonist!!"

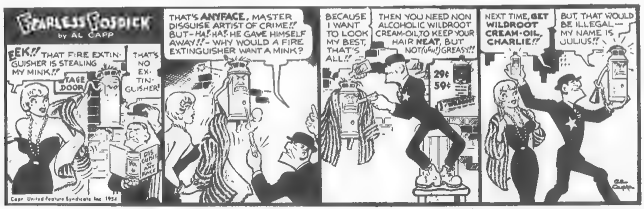
After the syndicate chief calls in some thugs from another sort of syndicate to work Gooch over till his sanity slips (which they eventually achieve by overdosing him with radio soap-opera), the chief looks at Gooch's fresh batch of Fosdick strips and beams satanically: "It's *ghastly!!* The morons will *love* this!!" A few panels later, there's Abner, reading the same strip, saying: "Ah *love this!!*"

All of this is a framing device around a Fosdick story, in which, fittingly, Fosdick's sanity is questioned when he suspects a series of crimes are being engineered by a Chippendale chair. Tying the framing device in with the story itself in this manner is typical of Capp's masterful writing technique.

Capp usually used Abner in a framing device around Fosdick stories, showing him running to the mailbox, or to the train delivering papers, to get a glimpse at today's comic page. Throughout all of this Daisy Mae finds herself jealous of a "stupid comical strip" character, a condition a "real" gal like Daisy Mae finds ironic indeed.

Another irony—perhaps an inadvertent one—is that Fosdick himself becomes a real, appealing character, despite the unreal, unappealing Gould-derived world he inhabits. Capp—despite public pronouncements of admiration for Gould—obviously found much of Tracy repellent, particularly the glorification of police (Fosdick being a child of Capp's liberal period), and Fosdick is often a savage parody. What makes it *seem* a loving parody is Fosdick himself: he is child-like, naive, loyal, brave, self-sacrificing and thicker than a plank. He seems, at times, a more appealing character than Dick Tracy himself—who has occasionally been accused, with some justification, of being the least interesting character in his own strip (not to worry, as long as the likes of Flattop are around). Incidentally, Chester Gould publicly gave his approval to Fosdick, but then later Rick Fletcher, Gould's longtime assistant, once told me Gould had come to feel his friend Capp should drop Fosdick—"Enough's enough," Gould reportedly said. On the other hand, Gould once told me that he didn't mind Fosdick at all—whenever Capp ran a Fosdick story, he said, a few more papers would pick up Tracy.

Perhaps the classic Fosdick story (one of a number of late '40s stories reprinted in the 1956 Simon & Schuster collection, *Fearless Fosdick—His Life And Deaths*) is "The Case Of The


FEARLESS FOSDICK
by AL CAPP
EEK!! THAT FIRE EXTINGUISHER IS STEALING MY MINK!!
STAGE DOOR
THAT'S NO EXTINGUISHER
THAT'S ANYFACE, MASTER DISGUISE ARTIST OF CRIME!! BUT--HA-HA! HE GAVE HIMSELF AWAY!!-- WHY WOULD A FIRE EXTINGUISHER WANT A MINK?
BECAUSE I WANT TO LOOK MY BEST, THAT'S ALL!!
THEN YOU NEED NON ALCOHOLIC WILDROOT CREAM-OIL TO KEEP YOUR HAIR NEAT, BUT NOT--UGH! GREASY!!
29¢ 59¢
NEXT TIME, GET WILDROOT CREAM-OIL, CHARLIE!!
BUT, THAT WOULD BE ILLEGAL--MY NAME IS JULIUS!!
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Poisoned Beans". By way of a personal footnote, I should add I first read this story around 1954, when I was six or seven years old, and a dyed-in-the-wool Tracy fanatic. Tracy was every bit as much my "ideal" as Fosdick was Abner's. And I was offended, and puzzled, and, finally, disturbed by Capp's parody of my favorite strip. The satirized violence especially threw me, as I attempted in my child's way to read the book "straight". Over a period of a week I read the book over and over, compelled to do so until I got a handle on it, I suppose. I did not, at that early age, come to understand "The Case Of The Poisoned Beans". But I did come to love it. It remains my all-time favorite comic strip story.

Oddly enough, "The Case Of The Poisoned Beans" (and I regret to report that I do not know the dates of its original newspaper publication, but presumably it appeared in Sunday pages circa 1949) is a foreshadowing of the Tylenol murders. Fosdick is made the victim of a "perfect crime"—a dying villain (actually a dead villain, but never mind) informs Fosdick that he has poisoned *one* can of the most popular brand of beans on the market ("Old Faithful" brand). Fosdick's unique method of dealing with the situation is to shoot anyone he sees eating beans! Fosdick shoots hundreds of citizens, to protect them from accidentally eating the one can of poisoned beans; no one is safe from Fosdick's "protection"—he even kills his "favorite aunt" when she dares to open a can of Old Faithful beans.

Capp takes his absurd premise to blissfully absurd heights: when Fosdick's gun is stolen, he resorts to using a bow-and-arrow to "protect the public"; gangsters open up "bean-easies", and Fosdick plays Eliot Ness, shooting up the joints, filling various citizens full of the trademark of the Fosdick "strip"—large round bullet holes which you could see through to the other side. Finally, after his Chief hasn't blinked an eye at the hundreds of citizens he's "protected", Fosdick "protects" a cop and the now-outraged Chief charges him with murder. Fosdick's last meal is beans and, of course, he at last finds the can of poisoned beans he's been seeking (he's back on the job the next day, however, because, although dead, it was "only a mild case").

Capp makes Fosdick's police brutality acceptable, even funny, because Fosdick operates out of misguided goodness; he is, like Abner, an innocent. He is also a victim of the system, and his various Chiefs are venal and cruel—for example, at the close of the poisoned bean case, his Chief says, "I suppose you want your old job back again, eh? But, I hope you

FEARLESS FOSDICK
by AL CAPP
EEK! A BEAR!!
THE BARE FACTS ARE, MADAME, THAT THIS IS ANYFACE, IN ONE OF HIS MOST BARE-FACED DISGUISES!!
STOP, FOSDICK!! I CAN'T BEAR THIS!!
AND I CAN'T BEAR ANYBODY WITH MESSY HAIR!!
WILDROOT CREAM-OIL WOULD HAVE KEPT YOUR HAIR NEAT, BUT, NOT--UGH!--GREASY!!
MAKES MY HAIR BEHAVE TOO!
WILDROOT
GET WILDROOT CREAM-OIL, CHARLIE!!
-BUT THAT'D BE ILLEGAL!!
-MY NAME IS HERMAN!!
POLICE BEAN CAR

FEARLESS FOSDICK
by AL CAPP
DON'T DUNK ME IN THE VAT!- BOILING ALCOHOL, ANYFACE!!
GACKLE!! WHY NOT FOSDICK?
BECAUSE-- URGLE!! BLURP!! GURGLE!!
HOW'S THAT AGAIN?
-BECAUSE ALCOHOL DRIES MY HAIR-MAKES IT HARD TO COMB!! SO I USE WILDROOT CREAM-OIL!! IT'S NON-ALCOHOLIC!!
WILDROOT
KEEPS HAIR NEAT- BUT NOT-GOT-GREASY!! GET WILDROOT CREAM-OIL, CHARLIE!!
THAT WOULD BE ILLEGAL- MY NAME IS-URGLE!! BLURP!! GURGLE!!
AL CAPP

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realize you're *officially dead*—so you'll have to start all *over* again, at an apprentice's pay—$11.75 per week." Fosdick's chin juts proudly forth: "I am confident I can work my way back to the *top*—namely, $23.45!!" (In a later story, when Fosdick is tossed off the force unfairly, he takes an aptitude test, and is told: "Here are some dark glasses, a tin cup, and some pencils. Good luck, on whatever street corner you select, Fosdick.")

In a somewhat similar story, which ran in dailies in 1951-52 (also reprinted in the 1956 Simon & Schuster collection), Fosdick is forced to play bodyguard to an Atomic Bum. This irradiated nogoodnik holds the city ransom, by threatening to throw himself off a building and blow up. Fosdick must aid the purple-lipped Atomic Bum in all sorts of obnoxious and often criminal pursuits (including allowing the bum to paw Prudence Pimpleton) but finally, after discovering the bum's radiation has worn off, Fosdick is able to shoot and kill him; but only after the bum breaks the law—by walking on the grass.

Once he hit a stride with Fosdick, and the strip-within-the-strip took on a life and character of its own, Capp only rarely parodied Gould's grotesque villains. A notable exception, however, is "Anyface", who appeared primarily in the famous Wildroot Cream-Oil ads of the early '50s. Anyface did appear a few times in the strip, and his origin tale (reprinted in the Harvey *Li'l Abner* comic book, #68) is fittingly a tale written by Lester Gooch while in the sanitarium.

The most significant use of Fosdick (and Gooch) within Abner took place in 1952. Abner joins a Fearless Fosdick fan club and pledges to do anything Fosdick does—but Fosdick is soon embroiled in a continuity (within the continuity) that seems to be leading to the long-awaited marriage between Fosdick and Prudence Pimpleton. What Abner doesn't know is Daisy Mae has had a chance encounter with Lester Gooch himself, and convinced Fosdick's creator that his character is "a *horrible example* to youth" because he has never married; Gooch drives off convinced that "*Fearless Fosdick must marry!*" And Fosdick does, and so (—sob—) does Abner. But in a dream Fosdick promises Abner he will, at the last minute, save him ("Ah got *faith* in yo', Fosdick—yo' is mah ideel!!").

And, as it turns out, Fosdick *wasn't* married—he was only dreaming—just like in the very first Fosdick strip-within-the-strip, ten years before. But Fosdick is just a "comical strip" character and can get out of his cliff-hangers in such a contrived fashion—no such luck for Abner. Abner is "real". Which means "pore" Abner is *"hopelessly—permanently—MARRIED!!"*

Fosdick remained a part of Abner till the very end—the final Abner Sunday continuity was a Fosdick story. It remains unique among American comic strips, this strip-within-a-strip—Capp himself couldn't duplicate its success, try as he did with parodies over the years: *Steve Canyon, Peanuts, Mary Worth* and *Little Orphan Annie*. Only Harvey Kurtzman's comic strip parodies of the early *Mad* (and those of Al Feldstein in *Panic*) truly rival Capp's Fosdick; but they were one-shots, and lacked the longevity of Capp's Tracy parody. On the other hand, *Mad*'s style of comic-strip parody (both writing and art) seems largely derived out of Capp, including the Will Elder-like craziness that goes on in the backgrounds and on the periphery of Fosdick panels.

Fosdick has, like Abner, been unjustly neglected of late; in the flurry of comic strip and comic book reprintings being announced from Segar and Caniff to EC and Little Lulu, Capp and Abner (and Fosdick) are nowhere to be seen. Perhaps one day time will forgive Al Capp his failings as a person and focus on what is more important: his brilliance as a writer and an artist; his importance as one of the truly great American cartoonists.

MAX ALLAN COLLINS is a novelist whose many mysteries include the current, critically-acclaimed True Detective; *his comics work includes being sole writer of the Dick Tracy comic strip (since 1977) and co-creator (with cartoonist Terry Beatty) of the Ms. Tree comic book feature. Recently he contributed notes to Russ Cochran's* Crime Suspenstories *volume in the EC Library.*

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INSIDE NMP

"Holy caravan, Boldman. Where are all those trucks going?"

"I don't know, Guy Wonder. We should check it out. One of our old enemies may be planning to take over the trucking lanes."

The masked crusader and Chum caught up with the last truck in a matter of seconds, throwing the Boldmoblie into overdrive. The Bold-ejection seats threw them onto the top fo the truck while the Bold-Autopilot took the car to safety. The wind beat against them, whipping their capes furiously around them. Finally they succeeded in entering the back of the truck. Ripping open the first box, Boldman was caught as hundreds of magazines came cascading out.

"What Is It, Chum? A diabolical prank of the Teaser... or perhaps a devious riddle left behind by Mr. Question." Boldman asked, struggling out of the pile of magazines.

"Holy Publishing Frenzy, Boldman. It's New Media Publishing. Look at all this stuff!"

Chum picked up *Comics Feature Collector's Edition No. 3, Horror In Comics.* "Look Boldman, Interviews with Richard Hescox, Dave Stevens and Bill Stout... and three horror stories written and drawn by Swamp Thing's pal, Steve Bissette."

"Bissette's been busy old pal. Here in the *Enterprise Incidents Presents Steven King* special he's done more artwork. NMP must have Halloween on the brain. Here's a *Fantasy Empire Presents HP Lovecraft*... with some spine chilling graphic adaptations." The Boldman shuddered as he thumbed through the book.

A low whistle escaped Chum's lips, "Wow, Boldman, look at this." He held up a piece of beautifully crafted fantasy art, a girl and her dragon.

"What's that you have there?" Boldman asked, keeping his place in the Lovecraft special.

"The New Fantasy Illustrator... It's got work by Tim Hildebrandt and Barclay Shaw. Holy masterpieces, Boldman, they're in color."

A flash of bright color caught Boldman's ever watchful eye. He reached down pulling up a magazine with the Better Space and Garden Seal of Approval. *"Enterprise Incidents presents The Alien Cook"* Boldman mumbled as he glanced through the magazine. "Tipr'k pudding pie... I haven't had that since the last time Flyingman flew us to Cathos. I've got to have a copy of this," Boldman chuckled as he lingered over the illustrations.

"Holy Golden Age, Boldman. Ron Goulart is saluting Timely in this issue of *Comics: The Golden Age."*

"What about DC?" Boldman pouted.

"That's next issue." Chum replied, not taking his eyes off the page he was reading.

"Forry... Forry Ackerman!" Boldman exclaimed. "I love this guy. He's putting together *MONSTERLAND* for NMP. With his connections this magazine is bound to be filled with interviews, reviews and pictures... I understand he's like this," Boldman crossed two gloved fingers, "with Vincent Price."

"Boldman, here's a list of things to come... a new magazine distributed by NMP, *SFTV*, plus *Enterprise* going monthly. *Fantasy Television,* blueprints, Technical books, The Avengers, U.N.C.L.E."

Boldman fingered the remote control on his Bold-Autopilot. "Come on, old pal."

"But I'm not through reading." Chum complained.

"We're going to drop in on publisher Hal Schuster, maybe he'll give us free subscriptions if we give him an interview."

All magazines listed above should be available in comic book shops and specialty stores. If you can't locate them, they can be ordered directly from New Media Publishing, Inc., 1518 E. Fowler Ave., Tampa, FL 33612.

Continued from page 26

MARVEL PRODUCTIONS

aimed at ten to eleven age group, since testing results have shown the younger children will watch what older children watch, but not vice versa. They want shows with equal boy-girl appeal. And they want shows that are very visual. Concepts should provide a lot of opportunity for sight gags, action and visual humor. Although dialogue is not altogether frowned upon (*The Smurfs* being a prime example of a successful, dialogue-heavy show), the old animation rule of "show it, don't say it" is still very much in effect.

There are two other elements that Loesch feels are vital for a good show. "You don't want to get too preachy," she explained, "and yet, some of the best cartoons have some heart. It's nice to have some emotion and a little bit of feeling among the characters in a show. And everything should also be bigger than life. Storytelling is something everyone loves. We love to be swept into something beyond ourselves, to a place where our imagination can take over."

With that, Loesch directed my attention to a framed Samuel Johnson quote on her otherwise bare and unfinished wall. It read: "Babies do not want to hear about babies. They want to be told of giants and castles."

"That's what I look for in a program," Loesch said.

READING COMIC BOOKS AND PLAYING WITH TOYS

Dick Robbins and Bryce Malek are two story editors at Marvel. Robbins is a veteran writer from the days of dramatic radio and live TV, who since 1972 has worked almost exclusively in the animation field, and Malek is a young man who used to work in Hanna Barbera's accounting department. It was Margaret Loesch who gave him his first writing assignment in 1980. Both

(Top Left) Stan Lee. (Above) Dungeons and Dragons. (Left) Howard The Duck. (Right) Hulk Hound.

Malek and Robbins came to Marvel in April of 1984, where they've been putting together the syndicated *Transformers* series ever since.

"It's based on a toy line," Malek says, "which a lot of Saturday morning shows are these days. They're similar to Go-Bots and about three or four other different lines. They are robots you can manipulate into jet planes and automobiles and all kinds of things."

The large number of characters in the *Transformers* series necessitated the hiring on of numerous freelance writers to get the scripts for the required number of episodes done on time.

"We normally would prefer to work with fewer writers," Robbins explains. "If we get a good writer to do a good script for us, we know his or her subsequent scripts will be even better. But we've been under the gun on this one. It's nice to have four or five writers for a series, but on this one we've had to have many more."

"In this case we were required to get out two scripts a week," Malek adds. "Twice as many as usual. We've had to work on several scripts simultaneously and some of our episodes are serialized. When we have a three-parter, it's not easy farming the information out to the person who's writing script #3 when you don't know what's happening with script #1. It can be pretty hectic and it gets very pressured."

Regardless of the pressure, Robbins

and Malek are enjoying working on *Transformers*. Because the show is syndicated, they have much less stringent restrictions on depicting violence and action then they would have if it was a network show. "We can do a lot more," Malek confirms. "The violence is between the robots, so there's nothing that kids can really emulate. You can destroy a robot and then fix him up tomorrow. This show's got laser beams, crashes, explosions... it's real violent and I think boys will love it!"

A script for an animated show is quite unlike one of a live show or a stage production. Robbins describes the extra work that goes into writing cartoons: "You do more script pages. An hour script for live-action will be about half as many pages as a half-hour

HOWARD
WHY FIGHT IT? I'M A HERO LEGEND!
THAT'S A HORRIBLE NAME! BUT FOR YOU IT'LL DO!
SINCE WE'RE HERE, WE MIGHT AS WELL SAVE THE WORLD!
WHERE'S THE BOSS? I'M HERE TO SAVE HIM!
SAY, IS THAT CHEWING GUM YOU'RE CHEWING?
IT'S NO USE! HE'S GONE! HE'S GONE!
WHAM!
HOLY MOTHBALLS!
THE END

animation script. That's because we have to describe *everything* that has to be drawn. We have to have long paragraphs, laying out every single thing. I mean, if a character winks, we have to write down 'character winks'. Live-action scripts can go for two or three pages that are all dialogue with hardly any description. They don't call for detail unless it's for a very specific purpose."

"You don't improvise with animation," Malek adds. "You can't just have the actors and the director come in and work it all out together. It has to be planned out and described fully, with a minimum of dialogue and exposition and a maximum of action. A lot of people can't handle that. It's a much more difficult field of writing, and most people will agree with that. And the pay is less."

"During one of the Writer's Guild strikes," Robbins recalls, "all live-action was struck. We're with a different guild, The Cartoonist's Guild, so these Writer's Guild members came to us, looking for work. Well, we started working with a lot of them, and they were horrible! Just have no realization of it. Total rewrites from fade-in to fade-out. They just didn't have the grasp."

Both writers confirmed that they never try to write down to their audiences. Malek spoke of existing in a kind of secret world that none of his peers knew anything about, but that he shared with the millions of kids who watch his shows. Robbins suggested that he probably hadn't gone beyond being eleven or twelve mentally anyway, and said that he wrote from the little kid he feels exists inside all of us.

"I enjoy writing for children's television because it's for an appreciative audience," Robbins says. "Personally, and I'm sure that Bryce has gotten the same reaction, when you meet a kid who has seen your show and tells you 'I loved this' or 'I liked that', it's very rewarding."

"This is a great job," Malek adds, "because we get paid to read comic books and play with toys. Geez."

THE ANIMATION PROCESS

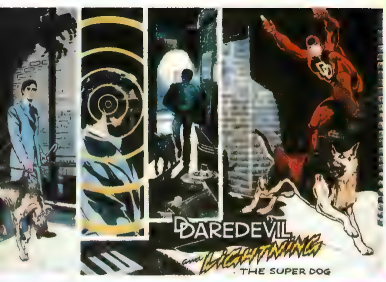
After a script has been completed and approved, it is handed over to the production department, where the arduous process of turning it into a cartoon show is begun. Lee Gunther, Marvel's Vice-President in charge of Production, gives a step by step explanation of the procedure:

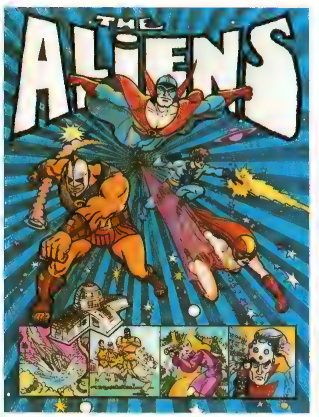
"We manage the flow of the production and see to it that the quality level is kept high. First, we assign the script to a producer, a director and storyboard people. The producer breaks the script down and hands it out to the various storyboarders, and at the same time turns it over to the model department, where the character models are designed. Usually, the main characters in a series have been designed previously, but for each episode there are always incidental models, props and numerous other things that have to be designed. The models are then color-keyed.

"When the storyboard is completed, we hold auditions for the voices of incidental characters. Normally, the main cast has been chosen beforehand. The dialogue is then recorded and cut together. The storyboard is then slugged, or timed, by one of our directors, and the track is tightened up based on that slugged storyboard. After that, the track goes into track-reading, where the editorial department phonetically reads the dialogue, frame by frame, onto animation exposure sheets.

"As this is occuring, our background design department is in the process of doing background layouts for each sequence in the storyboard. Those are then painted and color-keyed, so that each sequence in the picture blends in with the rest of the show and gets across the correct emotion: if it's a swamp, it should be moody, if it's a desert, barren and foreboding.

"When the exposure sheets come back, the director takes them along with the storyboards and directs the action and cuts the picture into scenes. The description of what is to take place is put down on the sheets. The animation for the dialogue-speaking mouths is exposed. From





Some of the animated series that Marvel has been developing.

that point, key animation, or those portions of the animation that we feel we need to do here to see how they're going to work, unfolds. When this is completed, we send it overseas, with at least one director and one animation checker for each series, to have the basic animation done. The people we send to Japan or Belgium or Korea supervise, answer questions, make changes and deal with any animation problems that occur on the spot. This insures that the end product does not take on the characteristics of the country in which it is animated.

"They follow the animation through camera overseas. When the entire picture is shot. It is assembled and returned to us. We look at it for retakes, mistakes, any problems, and we cut the picture down to size for network or syndicate length requirements. We then send back our retake list and the retakes are accomplished. In the meantime, sound effects, music and dialogue are all cut, dubbed and recut. When the retakes come back, we cut them into the picture, go to a sound company for a final mix, cut the negative and order a color print. The average length of time from when a final script is delivered into my hands to when we deliver that finished show to the network is anywhere from twelve to fourteen weeks."

THE PRODUCER'S JOB

Bob Richardson produced the *Dungeons and Dragons* show for Marvel last year, and this season he is providing the same services for *The Muppet Babies* series.

"A producer in animation is a little different than a producer in live-action," Richardson says. "A producer in animation is almost like a director in a sense, except that it's in a wider field. Once a buy is made on a show, the producer supervises everything until it gets on the air, including advertising and publicity.

"A director in animation is basically responsible for the timing of the exposure sheets, which is not something just anybody could do. It takes someone who knows directing and animation to do that. But he really has nothing to do with the development of the show or the storyboards or the script. That's all done through my office.

On *The Muppet Babies*, with the exception of anything that, contractually, Jim Henson and his people are involved with, Richardson has final say on artwork, background keys and anything done at the recording sessions.

"We work with Henson's people as closely as we can. They are very busy, and the time they have to devote to the show is limited. In the case of *Dungeons and Dragons*, any of the characters we used in the show which Gary Gulgaux's company had already designed or had some material on, had to have their looks and so forth approved by them before we could transfer them to animation. I think anybody who owns a property wants to safeguard their original designs."

Naturally, when an outside source's characters are involved, Richardson himself tries to make sure that a show remains true to the original creator's designs. Sometimes, as in the case of doing the voices for the *Muppet Babies*, this can create some bizarre complications.

"What we tried to do was retain the feel of Kermit's and Piggie's and everybody else's voices, but it was real difficult because we had to take these well-known voices and make baby voices out of them. Now, the adult Muppet voices were up in a high, crazy register of the throat to begin with. So we had to try to imitate that, then put it up into an even higher register for the baby version. In addition to that, we have a song in every show, so the voice people had to sing in those double-crazy registers. And the voice talent were not singers! It was a tricky problem, and I think it worked out pretty successfully."

Richardson went on to describe the *Muppet Babies*, with its elaborate mixture of animation styles, integrated live-action footage and combination of fantasy, musical and educational elements, as a wonderful concept and wonderful show to work on, but also as

a source of numerous production problems. "It is kind of a dual-edged sword. It's a show that's never been on TV before, particularly on Saturday morning. I've been in the animation business over twenty years, and it is the hardest show I've ever worked on, in any form. I've never had a show this complex.

"But one of the reasons why I've come to Marvel and have stayed with Marvel," Richardson adds, "is that Marvel continues to attempt to do better shows and make more exciting use of the medium than most of the studios in town do. Everyone else seems to do the same thing that's been done continually, over and over again. I think Marvel tries to do something that is maybe another step above average or better. That's the challenge to me."

ARTISTS AND ANIMATION

Among the many artists who design characters, backgrounds and storyboards at Marvel Productions are Scott Shaw, Larry Houston and Will Meugniot, all names that should be familiar to comic book fans. I asked each of them to compare working in animation to drawing for comic books.

"I like working in animation, I think, a lot better than comic books," Shaw told me, "and so does my bank. There aren't a lot of egos involved and you can get away from the house. I just about go crazy freelancing at home all the time. You can't hold the artwork up and ask 'How does this look?' or bounce an idea off of somebody.

"Both fields are creatively fulfilling to me because I've always liked doing the funny stuff. I don't draw the adventure stuff, so there's really very little market for me to work in comic books anyway. I wanted to be in animation, I guess, ever since *The Flintstones* came on. The first night they were ever on TV in 1960, I refused to go to my violin lesson. I said, 'Man, this has everything I like, dinosaurs and cartoons and it was made by the same guys who did *Ruff & Reddy*, and I can't wait...'. About a month after the head art director at Hanna-Barbera hired me to work on *The Flintstones*, I became one of the art directors for the show. Since I'd been drawing the Flintstones all my life, it came to me real fast."

"Animation, for me... it really pays my mortgage well," Larry Houston observed, echoing Shaw's assertion. "I like the self-expression in comics, but I can't afford to live on it. I also like the fact that if you own something, like Scott has a piece of his characters in D.C. Comics' *Zoo Crew*, it can help you become financially independent if they're ever merchandised in the future, and that will allow you to do what you really want to do." Besides having inked Shaw's *Captain Carrot and the Zoo Crew*, *All-Star Squadron* and *DNAgents*, Houston published his own fanzine about an Avengers-like group, *The Enforcers*, back in the mid-seventies.

Will Meugniot often finds himself torn between two loves. "It's terrible. The times when I've done either comic books or animation exclusively, I find myself missing whichever one I'm not doing terribly. With comics, the satisfaction is that you do finished art.

And with something like *Vanity*, where I'm writing it too and then inking it, I have total control, which is great. It's wonderful for your ego to just do stuff and have nobody disagree with you.

"But with animation, there's something delightful about doing something that you know is going to move. When you've storyboarded or laid out something, then go downstairs to editing and see it on a moviola, it's really, really exciting to see what's happened to it after it's gone through the director's hands and the animator's hands. Just seeing the thing in color, moving, kind of larger than life, is real nice."

Of the three artists, Larry Houston has been with Marvel Productions the longest. He worked on the studio's first show, the syndicated *Spider-Man*

Spider-Man (left) made it to the air, Daredevil (Above) is still just a proposal.

series, and then continued drawing storyboards for the series when it was picked up by NBC. He is currently a storyboarder for the company's syndicated *G.I. Joe* series. But it was on the *Spider-Man* show that the devious mind of an unrepentent comic book fan really cut loose.

"I'm one of the people who put those little in-gags into the *Spider-Man* shows, like when there are cameo shots of The X-Men or Daredevil. In one episode of the syndicated show, the writer wrote a scene in which Peter Parker came home to watch TV, and on the TV was a soap opera. What I did was change it so that The Avengers, The Vision, Thor and Captain America were fighting some menace on the TV."

It was Will Meugniot who got Houston out of his job as a computer analyst and into animation when Meugniot was a supervisor at Filmation Studios. Meugniot himself came to Marvel when the *Spider-Man* and *Hulk* network shows, for which he did storyboards, were in production. Meugniot also did a considerable amount of development work on *Captain America* and *Iron Man*, two animation proposals that were never picked up.

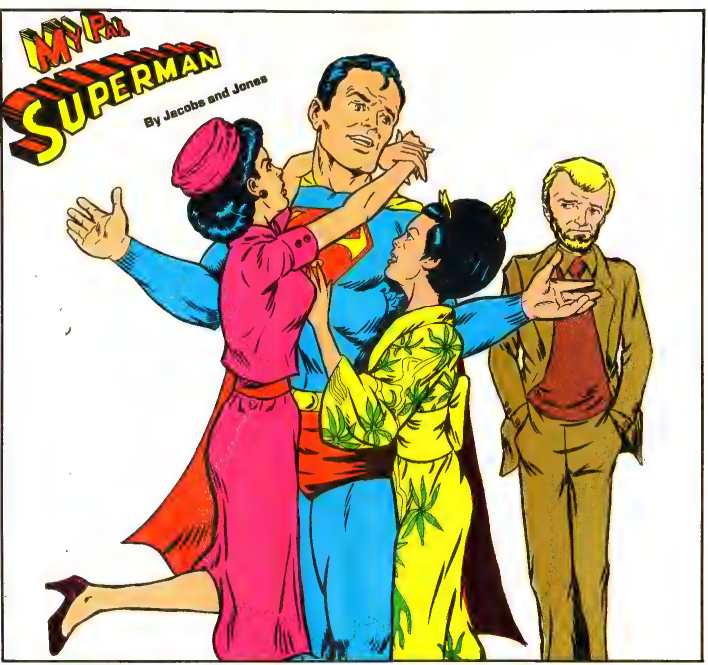
After taking a few years off to work exlusively in comics, Meugniot is back at Marvel Productions, working on the *G.I. Joe* show and also on animated commercials for the toys that the show is based on. "It was Larry Houston and Rick Hoberg who first told me how wonderful it was to work at Marvel and how neat it was that they were trying to do better product," Meugniot recalls. For the artist, who has worked with such major figures in the animation business as Doug Wildey, Mark Evanier and Tex Avery (with whom he did *The Thing* series, one of Avery's last, for another company), the description of the Marvel operation seems to have been accurate.

Scott Shaw confirms it. "I've only been here a few months, doing storyboards, writing gags and supervising the designs of the characters and props for *The Muppet Babies* show," Shaw said. "It's real nice working here. They have a nice, new building, a lot of my friends are here, Stan Lee comes in every day to play chess so I can heckle him with old titles out of Marvel magazines ('When Titans Clash', 'My Friend, My Foe', 'Lo, This Stan!')."

As if on cue, Stan Lee came through the door of Shaw's office and made a beeline for a table at the end of the room, on which rested the playing board of a slowly progressing game of chess. As Lee scrutinized the game board, thoughtfully working out his next move, Shaw, true to form, began heckling from behind his drawing board.

"Stan trimmed his moustache off, and I decided he did it as a promotion for *The Secret Wars*. 'Stan went off to the Secret Wars and came back... changed. If you want to learn the Secret of Stan's Moustache, read *The Secret Wars!!*"

Laughing with everyone else in the room, Lee made his move, told Shaw he was a funny guy and then headed out the door and down the hall to think over some new ideas.



"Tell me, Will. Often, when I read the liner notes on novels, I encounter the word 'Rabelaisian'. What exactly- is meant by that?"

"Well, Kal, Francois Rabelais was a sixteenth century French surgeon who wrote novels in his spare time. His work was primarily characterized by ribald humor and gargantuan absurdity. Today, when a novelist displays these traits, he is often said to be Rabelaisian."

"But Will, that sounds like what you told me about Lawrence Sterne. Why don't we hear the word Sternian?"

"Literary critics are a superstitious, cowardly lot. If one phrase catches on, the others are afraid to deviate from it."

"You know, that reminds me of the Phantom Zone, where all the Kryptonian criminals herd together like hyenas."

I chuckled and said, "You always were a wit."

Kal looked at me mystified.

"Forget it," I said.

Kal shrugged and said, "Tell me, Will, are Rabelais' books still in print?"

"Sure," I said, reaching to the shelf behind me. "I can lend you my Viking edition of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

"Good," Kal said. "That'll save me a trip back in time." He stuffed the book in the secret pouch of his cape and said, "Thanks, Will." Then he said, "I'll tell you what. It's such a nice evening, why don't I go get Lois and you get a girl and we'll all go out to dinner together."

WILL'S CONFESSION

"That would be great," I said. "But... er... I'm afraid I don't have any prospects lined up."

Kal's brow furrowed with concern. He said, "Come on, Will. You don't mean to tell me there isn't a single girl you can ask out?"

I fidgeted uncomfortably and said, "We all fall upon hard times, Kal. Metaphorically speaking, I've undergone a loss of romantic powers similar to the loss of super-powers you suffer under a red sun."

"Will, you don't mean you're..." He drew up short, unable to finish the sentence.

It took me a minute, but I finally got it. "Oh no!" I blurted out. "I didn't mean anything like that. I've been called Superman once or twice myself, you know. What I meant to say is that I've lost the ability to get to know girls, let alone romance them."

"I know," Kal said. "How about if I bring my old boyhood friend Lana along?"

The thought of going out with that fiery redhead made my head spin. But then I realized that it would never work out with Lois and Lana at the same table. First thing you know, they'd be scheming to uncover Superman's secret identity.

"I'm not sure that would be wise," I said.

"Isn't there any woman who interests you?"

"Well, there is a girl up the street I'm rather taken with."

"Well, there you are," said Kal, clapping my shoulder. "Ask her if she's busy tonight."

"There's a problem with that. You see, I don't really know her very well."

"How well do you know her?"

"I usually see her when I go to Safeway. I guess we keep similar schedules."

Superman's brow furrowed. "Have you ever talked to her?"

"Once, when we were in the produce section together, I asked her if she knew how to select a good avocado."

"What did she say?"

"She doesn't speak English very well," I confessed.

"Where is she from?"

"I'm pretty sure she's Japanese."

Kal chuckled. "You know, it's funny. I've never been able to tell Japanese from Chinese. I guess it comes with being from another planet. But we should do something about this young lady you've been admiring from afar. If you know a little bit about her schedule, I think we could manage to have you encounter her."

SUPER MATCH-MAKER

"Well, I have happened to notice that she walks home from the bus stop at about 6:45 every evening, except every other Friday," I said. "But I'm afraid I won't be a very entertaining date if I don't speak her language."

"Don't worry about a thing, Will. With my power of super-ventriloquism and my command of all the languages in the known universe, I'll take care of everything. Fortunately, Lois is in town on a newspaper assignment with my secret identity, Ken Clarkson. I'll be back, as Ken, within a half hour." He opened the window and prepared to go.

"Kal?" I said.

"Yes Will?" he said.

"Thanks," I said.

"Anything for a pal," he said. He waved and disappeared in a flash of blue and red.

It was hell waiting, knowing that I might at last get to know this woman who had tantalized me so much at a distance. And it would all be thanks to my pal, Superman. I wondered if even the best literary education I could possibly give him could ever repay him. But I knew better than that. Kal was a super-hero, the first and the best. No matter what he did for me or the rest of the human race, he didn't have it in him to expect repayment.

The doorbell rang at 6:40. I greeted Kal-El in his guise as blue-suited reporter Ken Clarkson. He introduced me to his companion, a perky brunette in a tailored yellow dress and a pillbox hat.

"Will Jones, this is my fellow reporter, Lois Lang."

"Pleased to meet you, Will," said Lois. "Ken tells me you're an aspiring novelist."

"Well," I said awkwardly. "I do like to write."

Lois chattered on. "I hope we aren't too early. Ken is always so nervous about being late. As you probably know, he doesn't exactly have nerves of steel."

Ken winked at me.

"We all have our faults," I said smiling knowingly. "Would you like to come in for a drink?"

Lois was about to accept, but Ken said suddenly, "I think it's time to go to dinner." His eyes were fixed at a spot on my wall, and I knew he was using his x-ray vision to keep track of my Japanese woman.

"Honestly, Ken, you are the most nervous man I have ever known," said Lois.

Just as Ken must have planned it, we saw the girl approaching when we reached the street. Suddenly, as we drew near, a pure-white dog charged at her from nowhere, barking and snarling and foaming at the mouth. She screamed in horror. At that instant a blast of Ken's super-breath picked me up and hurled me toward the dog. Not knowing what else to do, I yelled, "Scram! Scoot! Get out of here!" and waved my arms frantically.

The dog turned tail and ran. The woman nearly fainted and I caught her her in my arms. When the dog was far down the block it stopped, turned, winked at me and flew into the air like a bullet.

Only then did I realize that it was Krypto, the loyal super-dog of Superman's boyhood, no doubt following his master's ultrasonic commands. Evidently, Ken was planning to make me the Hero of the evening, without once revealing himself as the Man of Steel.

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

When the Japanese girl regained her composure, I heard Ken whisper, "Bow, Will," above the pounding of my heart. As I did so, I heard strange Oriental words coming from my direction in a voice uncannily like my own. Good old Ken. The girl was soon chattering animatedly and I, still facing downward was conversing with her. Suddenly she ranindoors.

"Why that's marvellous, Will!" bubbled Lois. "How did you ever become so fluent in Chinese?"

"Well, actually, it's Japanese," I said. "And it isn't so difficult. The only tough part is learning to read from top to bottom."

Ken ventriloquized in a whisper to me: "Her name is Michiko. She's single, she's grateful and she'll be right out. Remember, try to cover your mouth discreetly with a drinking glass or a napkin whenever I speak Japanese for you."

With Michiko at my side we were soon en route to a local Japanese restaurant. At Lois' insistence we sat at the sushi bar and sampled odd, nameless meats on rice balls.

"My, this is interesting food," said Lois. "I hope we get some raw fish. We don't have things like this in Metropolis. San Francisco is so colorful! Did Ken tell you why we're out here? We're doing a story on the gay sado-masochism scene for our Lifestyle section."

"That's fascinating," I said.

"The leather-work is wonderful," said Lois.

"Have you been to..." I began, but suddenly heard Japanese sounds leaping from my direction. I quickly whipped my face in Michiko's direction and threw a sake cup before my lips to hide them. She looked a little perplexed, but whatever I said must have been witty, because she dropped her chopsticks to giggle behind her hand. She inclined her head toward me in laughter, her sable hair brushing my shoulder.

Lois babbled on to Ken. It must have been a chore even for Superman to keep up witty banter for me while not neglecting Lois, but fortunately conversation with Lois calls for less talking than listening. When he couldn't ventriloquize for me, he helped in other ways. A cool breeze sprung up and Michiko snuggled close to me for warmth. It was Ken with his superbreath. When Michiko offered me a chunk of her raw fish and I wondered if I could summon up the courage to eat it, I noticed Ken discreetly cooking it for me with his heat-vision.

"This isn't raw fish, is it?" asked Lois, picking at something on a riceball. "Ken, you don't suppose this is raw fish, do you?"

But Ken was sitting stock still, as if listening to something none of the rest of us could hear. "Excuse me, folks," he said, sauntering toward the restroom.

"Oh, Ken, you're so dull," said Lois. "Why can't you be more like Superman?"

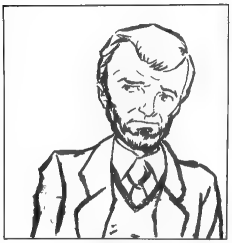
Michiko looked at me, smiling expectantly. Her cheeks were flushed from drinking sake and her luxurious hair fell across one eye. She was so beautiful it hurt. I didn't know what to say. I tried to think of an intelligent question.

"Er... what did you think of Nishima's suicide?" I asked.

"I sorry," she said. "Japanese please."

I was saved from a great embarrassment by sudden cries of "Superman! Superman!" from the tables by the window. Apparently his red and blue form had cleaved the sky for an instant, and everyone was craning to see. Michiko ran to the window.

Lois leaned toward me and whispered confidentially, "Have you



ever noticed that Ken is never around when Superman appears?"

I shrugged. "I'm sure there's nothing to it."

"Oh, that's what the Batman always says," she snapped. "I think you're all trying to keep something from me."

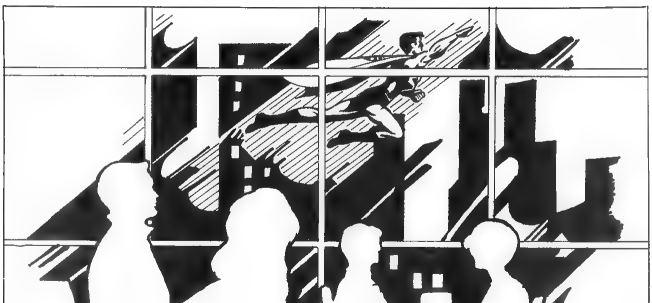
Just then Ken strolled back from the restroom, combing back his hair. "What's all the excitement?" he asked. "Did I miss something?"

"You don't know a thing about it, I suppose?" said Lois icily.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

When Michiko returned, she squeezed my hand and bubbled over with words, probably about Superman. I longed to say anything that would encourage her to keep seeing me. I figured that once Ken got her interested in me I could learn Japanese and keep things going on my own. Almost inaudibly I whispered, "Tell her that I can introduce her to Superman." I knew only Ken's super-hearing would pick up my words.

I covered my mouth and Ken promptly ventriloquized. Michiko looked perplexed. Ken tried again. The words were strange, full of L-sounds and



strongly rolled r's. Michiko asked a question in Japanese and this odd language filled the air more and more stridently. People turned around to stare. Then Ken gave up. Michiko drew away from me, troubled. I desperately tried to communicate with her.

"Er... you likee sushi?" I asked.

Suddenly she bolted from the sushi bar, tears shining in her eyes.

"Whatever did you say to that girl?" demanded Lois, running after her to the bathroom.

I was dumbfounded. I shook Ken by the arm. "What happened? What was that language?"

"I don't understand it," he said. "I tried to speak Japanese and instead spoke Kryptonese, the language of my native planet Krypton which was destroyed by a tremendous explosion when I was an infant. Then I tried Korean, Mandarin and two of the Ainu dialects of Hokkaido, but for some reason whenever I try to speak a foreign language it comes out Kryptonese!"

"You were doing fine before you disappeared!"

"I picked up an ultrasonic intergalactic distress call with my superhearing," he said. "A planet of peaceful alien creatures orbiting Arcturus was being attacked by my old enemies in the Superman Revenge Squad. I flew out to set things right and hurried back by the shortest—Great Scott! Now I remember! That red meteor I passed must have been composed of red kryptonite, the mysterious substance from the planet Krypton which mutates all Kryptonians in the most fantastic ways possible for twenty-four hours!"

"Damn it, Ken!" I said. "Twenty-four hours is too long! This is my only chance with Michiko, and she must already think I'm snubbing her."

I was frantic, but Ken, as always, remained calm. "You know, Will," he said, "red kryptonite always lands me in some seemingly inextricable predicament. I'll have to think hard to get us out of this one."

"Well, think fast," I said. "Because here come the ladies."

Lois approached us huffily while Michiko waited behind her, eyes averted. "I don't know what your friend said, Ken, but Michiko here thinks he doesn't want to talk to her anymore. I'm taking her home."

"Er..." I said.

"Now Lois, I'm sure... er... Will didn't mean to offend her," said Ken.

Lois angrily led Michiko to the door. Michiko turned to me with a look of sadness that tore my heart out. "Sayonara", she said.

They never got to the door. To everyone's amazement, most of all to mine, Superman appeared. He strode through the restaurant, meeting the awed whispers of the patrons with a reassuring smile.

SUPES DOES IT AGAIN

But wait a minute, you say: How can Superman be here when his alter-ego Ken Clarkson is standing by my side? Can it be one of the Superman robots Ken keeps in his Metropolis apartment to help preserve his secret identity?

But Superman bowed to Michiko and addressed her in fluid Japanese. Michiko squealed and clapped her hands like a child. When Superman finished his speech she turned to me and shook my hand.

"I sorry. Before I not understand what happen," she said. "I hope you feel better soon."

Mystified, I bowed and thanked her.

"Well," said Ken, "shall we finish our sushi?"

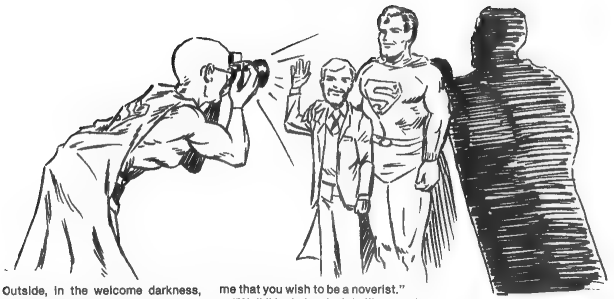
But Michiko, having said her piece to me, turned back to Superman. Superman tried to extricate himself, but Michiko sidled close and pelted him with questions.

Ken frowned. I guess he could tell as well as I could that, despite all his trouble, Michiko wouldn't be thinking much of me anymore that night. "I'm sorry, Will," he said.

"I guess it just wasn't meant to be," I said.

Without moving his lips, Superman suddenly said in English, "Lois, this girl has had a trying night. Why don't you walk her home? I'll explain the whole situation to Ken and he can fill you in later."

"Well, all right," said Lois reluctantly. "Come on Yoko. If the men want to have secrets from us, let them." As they left, Michiko waved plaintively to Superman alone, and Lois muttered, "I was sure Ken was Superman this time."



Outside, in the welcome darkness, Ken and Superman and I found one of Superman's robots waiting patiently.

"I want to get to the bottom of this mystery," I said. "Obviously, one of your robots couldn't speak Japanese fluently without the aid of super-ventriloquism. But, just like in the comics, one of your prominent friends could have disguised himself to resemble you and done your talking for you."

"Yes," said Ken. "By an ultra-sonic whispered command I ordered one of my robots in Metropolis to find a Japanese-speaking friend and whisk him here, along with a super-disguise kit. Then I informed him of the problem in English by super-ventriloquism and he was able to save both the social situation and my secret identity."

"Let me guess," I said, gesturing toward the ersatz Superman. "Under that lifelike rubber mask is the face of Wayne Brewster, better known as Batman."

"That's a good guess," said Ken. "But even the remarkably well-educated Wayne Brewster isn't fully conversant in the Asian languages..For this delicate assignment I needed someone in full command of Japanese."

The false Superman peeled the rubber mask from his head to reveal the face of an ancient oriental man in spectacles.

"Will, this is my friend Hirohito, the Emperor of Japan," said Ken. "Your Excellency, this is my friend Will Jones."

"Well, this is a surprise," I said.

"Very pleased to meet you," said Emperor Hirohito in accented but elegant English. "Superman informs me that you wish to be a noverist."

"Well," I admitted, "I do like to write. But tell me, what did you say to Michiko?"

"Ah, vely simple," said the Emperor with a quick bow. "This one said to young rady that Superman battled old nemesis, evil genious Rex Ruthor, in sky above San Francisco. During this battle, marevorent ray from Ruthor's virrainous devices struck unfortunate Jones-san, causing him to be unable to speak our humble Japanese ranguage."

"It's awfully nice of you to go out of your way to help me," I said.

"Hirohito and I became rather close during the Fifties, when he cooperated so admirably with our government," said Ken, putting his arm around the elderly nobleman. "But now I guess I should have my robot whisk him back to the Imperial Palace in Tokyo before he's missed."

"Prease, one moment," said the Emperor. He backed away, fishing in the pouch of his Superman uniform. "Prease stand together," he said, drawing out a Nikon camera with a flash attachment.

Ken and I posed, Hirohito snapped a picture, then Hirohito and Ken posed, and then the Emperor and I. At last we bowed and shook hands.

"I hope to meet you again, Jones-san," said the Emperor. "And prease, visit me anytime, Superman. I mean... Mr. Crarkson!" He set up a high-pitched giggle and replaced the rubber mask of Superman. The Superman robot gathered him up, wrapped him in its cape to shield him from the buffeting of the wind on his trans-Pacific flight, and launched itself into the sky. We waved until they were out of sight.

"Cup of coffee?" asked Ken as we walked along the dark street, watching the fog pour in from the ocean.

"Maybe you should get back to Lois," I said.

"I'm really sorry about how things worked out tonight," said Ken.

"Red kryptonite always picks the worst times to afflict me. I should have been more careful."

"Don't worry about it," I said. "I've learned a lesson from tonight. Nobody can make me more appealing to a woman than I already am, not even Superman."

"There's a million fish in the sea, Will," said Ken.

"She seemed taken with you," I said. "Or at least with Emperor Hirohito dressed up as you. Will you be seeing her yourself?"

"I wouldn't do that to you, Will," said Ken. "Neither would Hirohito. He's a decent fellow. Since he got over his pretensions of divinity, he's really been a regular Joe. It isn't every world leader who would drop everything like that for an old pal."

"At least I can feel that Michiko doesn't hate me," I said. "But I guess I'll never be able to see her again."

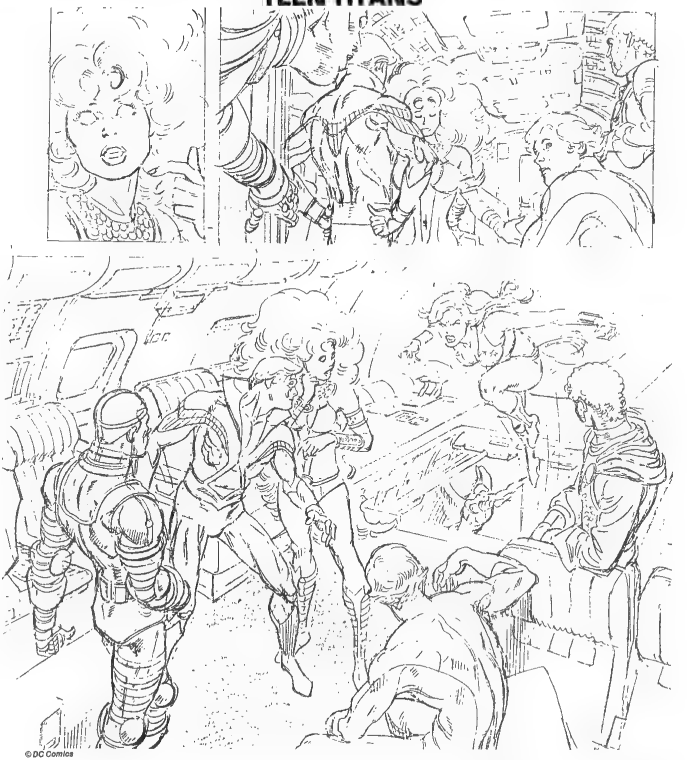
We stood on a hill looking out at the lights of the city, softened by the fog. Ken put his arm around me.

"I know it's disappointing, Will," he said. "But think of the heartwarming lesson we've learned. You may have lost a girl, but we've seen how the leaders of the free nations of the world can come to the aid of their allies in solving international problems."

"Yes," I said. "That's some consolation."

NEWS *Continued from page 7*

JOSE GARCIA LOPEZ TAKES OVER AS ARTIST ON NEW TEEN TITANS



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SHAKE-UPS IN THE INDUSTRY

CHANGES AT ECLIPSE AND FIRST THE DEMISE OF PACIFIC COMICS NEWS ANALYSIS BY HAL SCHUSTER

The late summer has been a busy time for the comic book industry. Many of the newer so-called alternative comic book publishers that have seemed to pop up like so many poppies over the past two years have begun to feel the impact of a changing and stagnant marketplace. Pacific Comics has all but shut its doors hot on the heels of the cancellation of both Capital Comics and Texas Comics. Other companies have suffered major staff losses.

Perhaps the biggest news is from Pacific Comics, the company that seemed to be the cutting edge of the new market forces up until a very short time ago. In fact, right up until the very day that the telegram was issued by the company, most industry observers believed it to be the largest independent publisher only exceeded by industry giants Marvel and DC. Now all of that is a thing of the of the past. The company which was the first new firm in years to enter the color comic book market and a pioneer in creator-owned characters is no more. Although the distribution arm continues and several, minor reprint titles and portfolios are planned, either under the Pacific Comics or the Schanes and Schanes label, the comic book publisher has shut its doors and laid off its staff. The freelance creators and their agents are pounding the pavements looking for new homes for their four-color fantasies.

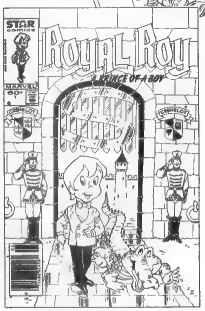
Pacific Comics blamed their troubles on the poor cash flow of their distribution arm—the part of the company which distributes the wares of all of the comic book publishers to a group of stores in southern California —but there may have been other forces at work. It has been noted that increasingly their comic book line consisted of reprints or factory packages from individuals such as Bruce Jones, Bill Dubay and others. Pacific was also the distributor for Continuity Comics, Neal Adams' new comic book line which is now looking for a new way to reach its customers. Perhaps the books being issued by Pacific were not reaching a wide enough market to support the impressive ambitions of the publishing firm. Perhaps losing Mike Grell's **Starslayer**, Jack Kirby's **Silver Star** and **Captain Victory** and recently Sergio Aragones' **Groo, The Wanderer** helped to weaken the company. Or perhaps we will never know the reason. In any case the company has stopped its comic book line and closed at least one of its warehouses. It has consolidated all operations to the Los Angeles facility.

Other companies have experienced less drastic setbacks. First Comics has lost its art director, Joe Staton, who had been with the company from its very first days and provided much of its guiding force. Eclipse has also suffered a loss. Jan Mullaney, part of the brother act of Jan and Dean, has left the company to concentrate on his career in music. Jan had been acting as the financial wizard behind the company from its beginnings even providing much of the capital that was needed. Now brother Dean steps into that role as Cat Yronwode (Dean's wife) assumes much of the editorial responsibilities. The firm has also lost several titles culminating in the cancellation of the flagship Eclipse Comics. A number of the books in the line have also experienced price hikes and it is rumored by a number of well-placed sources that the only thing keeping the company alive are the popular titles created by Mark Evanier, spinning off of the **DNAgents**.

Many market wags feel that the direct comic book market has not been in the bad shape that it is now for quite some time. A number of pominent stores have closed in the past year and one ex-key employee of a large specialty distributor flatly stated that he would not even consider owning a comic book store in the present market. Echoes of gloom and doom

seem to be on the lips of many distributors and retailers as they survey the wreckage. One fear is that the cancellation of many comic books and the demise of a number of specialty publishers will lead to a general shrinkage in sales even below the levels existing prior to the creation of the cancelled titles. While at first glance this seems to be poor arithmetic—if you add something and then take it away there is no net change—there is an unfortunate logic to the claim. It seems that when the proliferation of titles began many readers stopped buying some of the exciting titles from Marvel and DC and began to purchase the new books. There is no assurance that with the termination of the new books that readers will return to the titles which they have not read in a year or two. They might just shrink their purchases. Only time will tell.

Sergio Aragones brings Groo The Wanderer to Marvel



STAR Comics from Marvel is a new children's line.

Dune Marvel Super Special

MARVEL LAUNCHES MAJOR NEW MAGAZINE TITLE: SAVAGE TALES TO COMPETE WITH SOLDIER OF FORTUNE AND THE SILVER SURFER MAY SOAR AGAIN

Savage Tales, a fifteen year old now-defunct Marvel magazine is back. *Savage Tales* is a brand new unprecedented entry into the macho field from Marvel. While these two statements appear contradictory they are both unabashedly and absolutely true.

In the late Sixties Marvel first made its magazine entry into the field of adventure with highly fantastic tales of Ka-Zar and the debut of Man-Thing in a magazine entitled *Savage Tales.* The black-and-white title was eventually supplanted by *Savage Sword of Conan* while Man-Thing temporarily moved into the four-color world. Now Marvel is reusing the name for a very different book—one designed to compete head-on for the same audience as *Soldier of Fortune* and *Easy Rider.*

Larry Hama is very excited about his latest project, a bi-monthly black and white magazine called *Savage Tales.* It's what he calls "macho adventure". Format will be short stories, but the stories will have continuing linkages from issue to issue. Subjects will range from Vikings to westerns to war tales, all geared towards strong, gritty tales.

"We have a lot of good, solid talent on this book," he told *Comics Feature.* "We're all very excited about it, and we think there's an incredible market for it. It's in the same package format as *Savage Sword Of Conan,* which we found was being put on the shelves beside *Soldier Of Fortune* and *Easy Riders.* That's the kind of readers we hope to attract to *Savage Tales.*"

At present the first issue is scheduled for a January release. The logo is by Alex Jay—creator of the popular logo for *Machine Man,* among others—and the cover is by Michael Golden. "It has two girls in leather on a motorcycle, firing machine guns at the readers," Larry chuckled.

The lead story, written by Doug Murray and drawn by Golden, deals with a unit in Vietnam. "Doug was in Vietnam," Larry explained, "and he knows what he's talking about. The style is almost documentary, but with plenty of action." Hama was so pleased with this first story that he contracted Murray to write a series. Artist Mike Golden is another Vietnam veteran, and is reportedly thrilled with the scripts.

Herbe Trimpe will be doing a series about an air ace. "Herb's main love is flying," Larry said, "and he even owns and flies his own plane." Another continuing series by Will Jungkuntz, is called "Blood and Guts". Gray Morrow is contributing a realistic western.

"We want stories about real people," Larry concluded. "There will be no superheroes in this book—it will be almost factual, historical adventure."

In unrelated news, there is a strong possibility of a 12 issue maxi-series featuring *The Silver Surfer,* and John Buscema has requested the art chores. When the original title appeared in the late sixties two names were linked with the creative end of that popular cult series. One was Stan Lee, the author of the entire run, and one was John Buscema, the artist for virtually all of the character's exploits. At that time Buscema developed a real fondness for the Surfer and although he was not chosen to handle the graphic novel released a few years ago he does hope to be present for this run.

AND YET MORE BUSCEMA

John Buscema will return as artist on *The Avengers* for Marvel Comics from issue #255. He is already well into that issue, and sees this as the first of a number. He may indeed become the regular penciller on the series, but word had not yet been received from Marvel at press date. "After a ten year absence," he told *Comics Feature,* "I've really enjoyed doing this issue!"

Buscema will not be leaving *Conan* thought as he still aims to pencil that magazine as well as *Kull.* But he has drawn Conan for so long that he welcomes a little more diversity in his work. Buscema's run on *The Avengers* was long and popular in the past and is considered by many to be one of the most productive periods in this very talented creator's career. Buscema himself did not much enjoy the work as he feels uncomfortable with superhero characters as he revealed in an interview in the September issue of *Comics Feature.*

HEROES *Continued from page 7*

Raven's mother is a woman who was used by practitioners of the black arts who were seeking to raise the devil. In his place appeared a handsome man whom Raven's mother became enthralled by and made love to. Only afterwards did she see beyond the image that Trigon had cast for himself, and what she saw was an inhuman horror and evil incarnate.

Trigon had mated with human women many times before but never before had one of his children survived

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through birth. This one ultimately would not have, either, had not a messenger from Azarath come to the woman as she was trying to commit suicide. He took her to the gleaming kingdom of Azarath which exits between all dimensions and was established by people who fled the hatred and warfare of mankind. There Raven was born and raised by Azar, the wise and aged woman who ruled them all. Raven was raised in the ways of pacifism as well as taught to submerge all of her emotions. She also learned the secrets of instantaneous travel and how to flow between dimensions. But she also ultimately learned of her soul self, which is her darker side—the part that is instilled with the essence of Trigon. Raven is also an empath who can heal pain and injury, but not disease.

Trigon has vowed to come for her one day and to use his hold over her to subvert all that she has learned. To make her his, once and for all. This is why she must submerge all her emotions. Unleashed, those emotions could be used by Trigon to manipulate her and draw her over to his ways. For part of her is Trigon, and always will be. It was also to aid her against Trigon that she sought out the Titans. While Trigon was not ready to take her to him when the Titans clashed with him in issue #6, the final conflict seemingly began to be unveiled with *The New Teen Titans #1* (1984). This is the direct market version whose stories will be reprinted in the regular newsstand title a year later.

INTERESTING WOMEN

What's surprising about the Teen Titans when you stop and think about it is that the most interesting members of the book are female characters. All too often in comics, female characters tend to seem less well thought out, just conjured up to be the distaff version of a masculine hero (Supergirl, Spider-Woman, She-Hulk, Ms. Marvel) or just plain not that interesting because the creative people behind them fail to identify with the female superstars. But Raven is so interesting that the fact that she's a woman is not even an issue—her personality is. She is so interesting that she seems to be a natural character, not someone's attempt to cobble together a superheroine. The same is true of Starfire.

Here again we have a completely new hero with a history so well developed that she is much more in-

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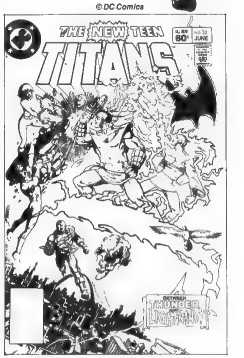
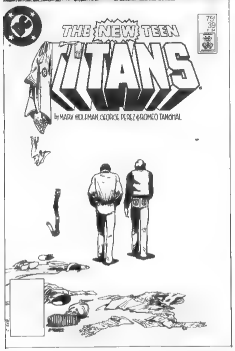


teresting than other superheroes who have existed for decades. Starfire is much more than just her powers as she is a person with a past, and that past has an unpleasant habit of catching up with her. *That* is what Starfire is really all about. That is what we see standing there looking over her shoulder whenever we see her, no matter how innocent the situation. There is a cloak of dread which invisibly follows her. Yet we *know* that it may appear just when we least expect it.



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Starfire is actually not of this earth, but is Princess Koriand'r of the planet Tamaran. The second child of the royal house, she was chosen to be given the title of princess, and thus the eventual succession to the throne. Her older sister Komand'r was sickly and lacked the perfect physique and abilities necessary to be considered for leadership. For one thing, Komand'r could not fly by riding the solar winds the way that Koriand'r could.

Komand'r took it upon herself to despise Koriand'r and attempt to make her life miserable even as a child. When they were sent to the planet Okaara to learn the arts of warfare to protect the peace and plenty they so cherished on Tamaran, Komand'r disgraced herself by trying to murder Koriand'r and was exiled. Komand'r took revenge by going to the Citadel world and siding with the enemies of Tamaran, betraying her home and seeing that Princess Koriand'r was sold into slavery. (See *Tales Of The New Teen Titans #4*).

But bad seemed to go worse when both Koriand'r and her evil sister were captured by the Psions, enemy of the Citadel and of all living creatures. An experiment to measure the endurance of Koriand'r and Komand'r to solar energy went awry. Instead of killing Koriand'r as was intended, it charged her with power far beyond the norm of her race. But Komand'r also gained new-found powers. When Koriand'r released her sister from the Psion's trap, Komand'r struck, defeating Koriand'r and showing her the folly of having compassion for her sister.

Imprisoned in an energy damper for a time, Koriand'r managed to escape in a shuttle. Some months later she landed on Earth where she met the Titans.

THE VILLAINS

Interestingly, when Marv Wolfman creates an important villain in the series, he doesn't bring the felon in on a regular basis to juice things up. Rather he continues creating new characters and situations and only returns the heavyweights when he's come up with a story worthy of their return. Trigon appeared only in Issue #6. Outside of the flashback appearance in the origin of Raven, and a couple of occasional glimpses, he was not brought on stage again to command our full attention and face off against the Titans until the companion series began in *The New Teen Titans #1* in 1984. The same is true of the Terminator, who appeared in Issue #2, #10

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and then didn't tackle the Titans head on again until #34. Then he pulled some surprising manipulations on the team until the climax of "The Judas Contract" (but more on this later).

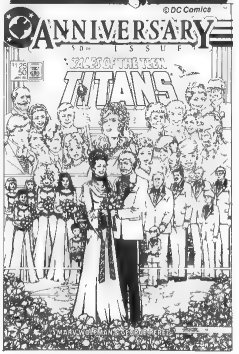
Brother Blood and his powerful religious sect appeared in #21 and 22, but important plot points in that story were not picked up and resolved until issues #40 and 41. Marv forgot that Brother Blood had seemingly discredited the Titans before the world as other stories kept pushing the follow-up aside. The follow-up was certainly worth the wait.

CONFLICT AND CHARACTER

All comic books depend on conflict and conflagration to maintain reader interest. What this series does is tie the conflict tightly to the characters. One of the best examples of this is the Starfire (Koriand'r) versus Komand'r angle. Right after the background of this brutal sibling rivalry was fully revealed in the Titan mini-series, the return of Komand'r, now known as Blackfire, was unleased in issues 23-25 and Annual #1 (with a two page revelation in #22 to let us know the worst was to come). Together these form a 112 page epic which stretched from Earth across space to the Citadel world where the final battle between Starfire and Blackfire finally took place. But since Blackfire's body was never found afterwards, it can be expected that she will be making another appearance when the time is ripe.

What has sustained this book and continued its growth is the emphasis on character. In *The Comics Journal* #79, Marv Wolfman explained that he has done this by, "giving the subtext to our characters, so that we do understand what they feel like, more than the Thing's insecurity about being a monster or Spider-Man going around blaming himself. That, in the past, has sufficed for characterization. But that's not really characterization, that's sort of glossing over troubles. Troubles and characterization are not the same thing... At least George (Perez) and I are making the attempt now to dig into the characters deeper than surface problems."

Their commitment to characterization was made early and underscored in "A Day In The Lives..." in issue #8. No super villains—(although a set-up for a showdown with one in #9 begins here), the menaces encountered are more commonplace. What matters in this story is that one particular day is like in each of their lives. While Wally West (Kid Flash) visits with his parents and deliberates over concerns that would eventually cause him to drop out of the group, Starfire finds herself in demand by a commercial photographer. Cyborg finds that an old girlfriend can't deal with how prothestics have changed him since his accident. But even this leads to a touching interlude when Vic Stone comes a group of children playing in the park and discovers that they all at-



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tend a special school for crippled children, learning to cope with prosthetics. This was an example of how Wolfman and Perez work together. While Marv Wolfman had just conceived Vic making friends with some children who aren't frightened by his appearance, George Perez added the element of the children also having prosthetics. But Raven, in keeping with the tortured inner life she lives, learns the hell she must go through when her soul self is too long gone from her body. This is one of the best of the early issues and showed the kind of experimentation which would become more frequent in the title.

In this same tradition is "Who Is Donna Troy?" in Issue #38. No fists fly here. Instead the super-heroine Wonder Girl becomes a troubled young woman whose past is opening up to her a piece at a time, thanks to the detective skills of Robin. Who is she really? She was rescued from a fire by Wonder Woman many years before. But who was the baby that Wonder Woman took back to Paradise Island? Piece by piece, Robin unearths the answers while Donna, who very much wants to know the truth, also fears what she might learn. The answers form an intricate mystery, and one of the single, best issues in the series. It's an example of a point Marv Wolfman made when he said, "I think you can get rid of action for issues at a time as long as you have very complex storylines. And characterization." This was one of those issues that make you realize just how good comics can be.

These descents into a grittier reality are not as rare in this title as I've made them seem. Issues 26 and 27 told the stories of some runaways, and reflected just what awaits these young victims on the lonely streets. Some people objected that the comics are too real because a child died. But then realism was the whole point.

Realism was also the point with the introduction of Terra, a new teenage heroine who won admission to the group and the affection of readers. It was revealed that she was the daughter of The Terminator and a plant to destroy the group from within. The four issue climax of this story, called "The Judas Contract", brought to a conclusion a story which on one level had begun in issue #28, a year-and-a-half before. The amount of information and creativity in the four part climax in issue 42-44 and Annual #3 merely served to underscore Marv Wolfman's point when he said, "the *Titans* is finally getting as good as the readers said it was." This is no mere self-serving boast on Wolfman's part. When a series he has worked on continuously for over forty issues can continue to improve as dramatically as this one has, when it was already very good, it shows his commitment to creative excellence.

TEEN TITANS VS. X-MEN

The Teen Titans are often compared to Marvel Comic's X-Men. Fans had a chance to compare them in 1982 in the 60 page X-Men and Teen Titans team-up book written by Chris Claremont and drawn by Walt Simonson and Terry Austin. The problem with it was that despite the inclusion of the Terminator as a flunky for Darkseid, it read very much like an X-Men adventure. It lacked the subtle character interplay between the Titans such as is explored in the comic. There wasn't much interplay among the X-Men either because the story was so thick with event and plot complications. If there was any doubt whose book it really was, The Phoenix was a main element and the

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climax focused on the conflict between her and Cyclops. While it remains a fascinating and enjoyable story, it was definitely the X-Men meet the Teen Titans rather than the Titans meet the X-Men. But when you have that many characters meeting under one roof, it's kind of hard to find much room to breathe. With the breathtaking art by Simonson and Austin, it's only in retrospect that any deficiencies show up, if deficiencies they are.

THE NEW TEEN TITANS

The Teen Titans is now more than the kids' comic of boys' adventures that it was in the Sixties. Under Marv Wolfman and George Perez it has become as close to perfection as any regularly produced superhero title has come. The characters continue to grow and change. Robin has, after forty some years, finally shed his short pants and kiddie costume. Wonder Girl has a real identity at last. Raven and Starfire are fascinating female heroes. Even the annoying, cloying personality of The Changeling seems to be getting hammered into some semblance of maturity with the death of Terra.

It just goes to show that comics can be challenging as well as a lot of fun. So how come *The Teen Titans* is one of the few that consistently is?

they did. But there were other things that I had written into the first draft script that were complicated pieces of action that could be used only once and they said, 'We can't do that. We have to do something a lot simpler.' And I can understand that. Everybody's got a budget. Disney is going to be coming out with *The Black Cauldron* which is, I suspect, going to be a very, very complicated piece of animation. So it can be done, but not if you're doing a weekly show.

"Saturday Morning cartoons are relative to full animation as a short story is to a novel. Maybe that's being much too fair, but given that to be true there are levels of limited animation and there are things that you can do with it which are much more clever."

One of the few genuine examples of cleverness to grace the Saturday Morning cartoon was *Rocky and Bullwinkle* in the Sixties.

"I think that *Rocky and Bullwinkle* is a special case in a lot of ways, mostly because the dialogue was so important. Somebody in a recent interview said that *Rocky and Bullwinkle* was essentially radio with pictures. I think in that respect that the animation didn't matter in that show. So it's a special case. Most of the other shows on Saturday Morning do not have that sort of script. They don't have that sort of script because they're aimed at a different audience because the people in charge are afraid that somebody won't understand."

While the days of off-beat and even sly humor seem to be gone from modern cartoons on television, it's still possible to sometimes slip little jokes through.

"Sometimes they get through and sometimes they don't," said Mel. "In the first *Heathcliff* I wrote they had a tuna boat and I called it the *Looney Tuna* and that got by. There are things you can do."

But, of course, there are also things that you can't do, even though they may be classic cartoon gags.

"There was a *Heathcliff* that I wrote where they're dealing with the space shuttle and Heathcliff and this other cat are chasing each other around. One of the things Heathcliff does to the other cat is to take this canister filled with oxygen, shoves it into the other cat's face as if it were a cigar, lights it and there's this fantasy land explosion and he's in black face and you can see the white eyes. Now this is not imitative behavior but it was just too violent. They said, 'No, this just isn't a joke we can do.' But a lot of times they do get by with things. There's the old Bugs Bunny kiss, you know, where he would kiss Elmer Fudd. You could get by with that. I could get by with Heathcliff pretending he's a mermaid by building sand up around his legs to look like a tail. So there are things you can get away with, crazy things, but you have to watch the level of violence. This varies even from company to company. They each have a different

approach."

But this doesn't mean that it's easy writing under these restrictions or that the resultant product is all that it could be. Even the cartoons made before the heavy hand of censorship descended on cartoon land in the Sixties now suffer from razor cuts.

"Just look at what they've done to the old Bugs Bunny cartoons, which is real sad. Let me give you an example of how harmful these cuts are, and this deals with more than just cartoons. It has to do with the nature and structure of commercial television.

"I heard an interview with Stan Laurel just before he died, which must have been back in the Sixties. He said that he could not watch his stuff on television because he and Oliver, when they wrote them, built them like fugues. They were very careful with the structure. Everything built on the last thing and it was a very logical structure. What happened on television is that the stuff would be cut. They would stop for commercials, you would lose the momentum and the structure and he just couldn't watch it because it was too painful. He said that they just blew the gag. And I suspect that cutting scenes out of a Bugs Bunny cartoon is the same thing: It's sacrilege and it's not necessary."

But this brings us to *why* cartoons are censored.

"The PTA and organizations like that accuse TV of all the ills of the universe. They say that our children are being misused and abused and being taken advantage of by television. My feeling is," Mel explained, "that a kid can watch just about anything if it's explained to him afterwards. If it's discussed, or even if it's not but the kid just has a reasonable home life and the parents like each other. I think that's real important. I think that parents liking each other and liking the kids and acting as a family is much more important than which show the kid watches on TV. Whether the kid watches the Playboy channel or a slasher movie, it just doesn't matter. If the kid has the right home life, if the parents are doing their job, it doesn't matter what he watches, period.

"Now I'm not in favor of gratuitous violence. I'm not saying that that's a good idea either. But I'm saying that kids can handle a lot more realism, can handle a lot more of the dark side of people than they're getting. That's all I'm saying. I don't mean that you should have shows and shows full of gore or car chases or anything else like that. Sure, if you show somebody car crashes with heads rolling off all day long it's going to get kind of tiresome. But everything gets tiresome after awhile. The thing is, when it becomes a plot necessity for somebody to get hurt or it becomes a plot necessity to even just talk about death, it should be done. Or when it comes time for the bad guy to be really bad, let him be really bad. Show them what bad guys are like.

"I think that kids and adults, all human beings, need an outlet. This doesn't mean that they should all go out and see slasher movies. But this does mean that entertainment should speak to the dark places as well as to the light places. I think that a lot of people who are talking about what kids should see in cartoons and movies don't really know kids very well or else they just know them from books. Or if they do deal with kids, they're not aware of the fairy tale as a cathartic tool. Ursula LeGuin's book *The Language of the Night* talks about the cathartic and necessary uses of fantasy. It discusses why fantasy is more important than realistic stories because it allows you to go places with a story that you could never go with something more realistic. Fairy tales are actually very, very complicated and that's all that Saturday morning is. It may have been sanitized to the point where they don't mean anything any more, though."

But this also gets into another aspect of violence on television, one which is perhaps more potentially harmful than showing too much violence. Images of violence shown on television are dangerously unrealistic. *TV Guide* presented this very point a few months ago.

"The idea there was that the problem with television is not that there is too much violence, but that it's the wrong kind. It's much too sanitized. I guess this goes back to the Lone Ranger when he would shoot somebody. He'd always shoot them in the arm and there would be this blood spot the size of a dime. But I understand that if you shoot someone in the arm it literally explodes.

"I think the same is true of cartoons. I think there's too much worry about imitation. I think there's too much worry about not offending anybody. Even given the limits of animation, I think that Saturday morning cartoons could be a lot more exciting. By exciting I don't mean more violent, I mean a better story where the concern is not so great with what a kid might do. What's essentially going on is that they're writing cartoons for what they *think* kids are like but not what kids *are* like.

"But will this ever change?

"Maybe there'll come a moment when somebody will say, 'Well, we've tried that, let's try something else for awhile.' I don't guarantee that will happen and this may be wishful thinking entirely on my part, but I don't think it can stay like this forever.

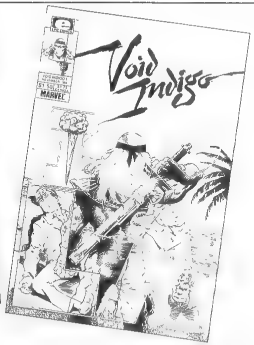
"I take that back. It can stay like this forever because unlike adult fiction and adult TV programs where you have the same audience year-after-year and have to keep offering them something new, with kids it's different. With an audience of kids, they grow up through your program and go on to something else. So you can show essentially the same set of cartoons every year for ten, fifteen, even twenty years and not have to worry much about it because you have a new crop of four-year-olds each year."

Publishers Picks

One of the largest specialty market distributors of comic books recently took Marvel Comics to task because their line of Epic Comics is different from the usual fare that the company produces. This normally intelligent individual was complaining that not every book produced by Marvel, particularly their Epic Comics line, has the same feel as Spider-Man, the Avengers and the Fantastic Four. The ambience is different. As a result he plans on listing Epic Comics separate from Marvel Comics presumably so that the contagion unleashed by the first doesn't infest the latter. While I do certainly recognize his right to format his list howsoever he chooses, it did strike me as an interesting notion.

As a result I decided to investigate the so-called quality books of both of the major companies which produce the bulk of our newsprint kiddie product. In a piece somewhat different than you would normally expect to find here I felt that it might be illuminating to examine the approach of each company to this type of book and to do an incomplete overview of what is coming out.

One difference strikes you immediately. DC Baxter/Hudson books are simply regular DC Comics printed on better paper and shipped only to the specialty market. They look the same, bear the same symbol and are even planned to be reprinted in newsprint editions in some cases. Marvel is different. They issue their quality line under a different imprint. On some books the Marvel name is still prominent, on others it appears quite small. In all cases the top of the book and the symbol are clearly Epic Comics and not Marvel. These are meant to be a different type of book aimed at a different market—much as the Star Comics are geared for the other end of the spectrum. In other words, DC Comics is one comic book line, edited through one set of editors and similar throughout the line while Marvel Comics is actually three lines of comic books with different editors and a different type of product and clearly marked as such.



At an editorial level the DC Comics are indeed similar fare to their regular books. Two of the titles feature the Legion of Superheroes and Teen Titans both of which have long appeared in the regular comic book line and neither of which was really changed for the transition. These are the stories that will wind up back in the regular comic books in one year as reprints. Both books have been remarkably good, but then they were also good in their former incarnations. Unfortunately the stories which appear in the regular books while awaiting the beginning of the reprints are not very good at all. Perhaps two books of each per month is simply too much for the company to handle.

Omega Men is yet another of the Baxter books from DC. This one is not nearly as good as the other two and seems to have lost all life long ago. Perhaps the musical chairs played by the creative teams have taken their toll or perhaps the story planned for the book has already run its course and it just lingers on. The characters began in some very run-of-the-mill heroes books, those of Superman and Green Lantern. Certainly this book falls well within the DC universe.

The next two, Infinity Inc. and Vigilante follow remarkably similar histories. Vigilante is a standard... well, vigilante. He began as a secondary character in the Teen Titans before graduating to his own title. It was odd for a while when he had his own high quality package and his godfathers only had newsprint but that has changed. This book has gone through several changes and been the butt of much criticism. It is an average title that has been lucky enough of late to have the talented pencils of Gil Kane and no book written by Marv Wolfman will ever be too bad. Infinity Inc. is a team based on the children of the Justice Society of America. Their parents only rate newsprint, perhaps appropriate for a group of Golden-Agers, but the children get Baxter. Only the best for the kids. I like Roy Thomas and I enjoy the Golden Age characters so this book which frequently guests the latter is welcome. But there is certainly nothing special here, just some interesting bits.

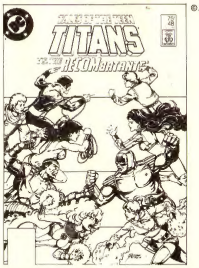
Thriller is different and I'm not sure DC really knew what to do with it. Both the original artist and the creator/writer are long gone but the book lingers on. Dubay and Nino do standard Warren-

type fare and the title is not long for the world. In fact it is already cancelled.

With Marvel the story is a bit different. The company has made a decided effort that nothing in the line bear any similarity to anything in their regular line—something of a necessity actually, considering that these are creator owned books unlike the company owned product over in the DC Baxters. Each title here is not the least like any other either. The first was Jim Starlin's, Dreadstar, a story about a future war between civilizations which turned into a self-serving piece where the protagonists fight each other as often as any enemy—oddly enough and for reasons I cannot quite put my mental finger on, this book reminds me very much of DC's Omega Men. Both seem tired and worn-out and lacking their original vitality. Starlin can certainly do better than this. Perhaps it is the many incarnations that pull at this one as it began as a graphic novel published by Eclipse, ran back-and-forth between graphic novels and Epic Magazine and then finally settled into this series which was planned to be canned as of #6. With #14 it seems as if the first idea was best.

Coyote was next. This too began at Eclipse within the pages of Eclipse Magazine. It ran over to Marvel and there went quickly through both creative and editorial changes. The people behind the book, Englehart and crew admitted that they didn't know where they were going and promised a new direction. They still seem to be looking for that direction. The back-up series is much better offering not only the fine writing of Englehart but also the craft of one of the comic industry's best Steve Ditko. This series, Djinn, originally appeared in Fantasy Illustrated, a book which I published. So perhaps it is only self-serving that I find this the best feature in the title.

Alien Legion is the Blackhawks in space, not as blatant perhaps as Skywolf in Marvel Fanfare or Sun Devils, but Blackhawks nonetheless. The book is a lot of fun with no redeeming social value at all. It is pure



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entertainment with a spacefaring Foreign Legion. Gungho! But then remember that the regular Marvel line doesn't have anything like it.

Six from Sirius is a mini-series and not an ongoing title. The story is by Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy and those of us who remember the heyday of Master of Kung Fu anticipated this one with great joy. We weren't disappointed. The art is photographic, the story complex, intelligent and concludes reasonably well. Read it.

The latest two offerings are Crash Ryan and Timespirits. Both are original and also copies of many things that have gone before. Crash Ryan is your standard Steve Canyon. Scorchy Smith, Tailspin Tommy, Johnny Hazard type of character and the storyline definitely could be something out of the 1940s pulps or comic strips. But with some real differences. It is set in another universe, technology is quite different and the course of history is ironically changed. The art style also gives one the feel of four decades ago. Or perhaps of how four decades ago viewed its future. Something very unusual and quite enjoyable.

The other is Timespirits which appears to be a copy of Doctor Who and perhaps is. The difference is the feel of the book and the fact that instead of vanilla, white bread Doctor Who we get some seemingly authentic Indian lore, both history and fable. This one bears watching as it could either turn quite sour or quite good. Doug Moench is doing a variation on this theme with his Aztec Ace over at Eclipse Comics.

The titles planned for the future by Marvel and DC pretty much bear out the trend. DC plans to offer several reprint books while Marvel/Epic will be adding Starstruck, based on a play, Groo, The Wanderer, Sergio Aragones' comedic barbarian swordsman, Swashbucklers, the closest thing to a superhero book without being a superhero book, Void Indigo, which began in the recently released graphic novel, The Black Dragon, an Arthurian by Claremont and Bolton (can only the English draw these?) and no reprints.

Throughout the line one thing is clear. DC feels that they have a winning combination and outside of one book we haven't covered thus far, Camelot 3000, they are sticking with it. Camelot, the creation of Mike Barr and Brian Bolland, is very original and unfortunately has taken several years to produce 12 issues of a monthly book. Perhaps this book, DC's first foray into this format, scared them away from experimentation. Or perhaps not. In any case, many of their titles are quite enjoyable but nothing different from what has safely been done before. Marvel created Epic to publish the works of creators who didn't want to part with their copyrights. They have experimented and missed the mark more often than not. Little that they have offered has been worth the paper they print it on. But some have been just fantastic —or at least fantastic for a while. They have added something new to what has gone before. Most of the titles being published under the Epic imprint should be cancelled to make room for new attempts, even by the same creators, but the experimentation should not be stopped. Who knows what may emerge from this energy. It is here that some of the most important work in the field is being tried, more so than at any of the so-called alternative publishers. Marvel is big enough to absorb a few losses in order to score a few wins.

Once upon a time...

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